Electrical storm

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by IceMachine101

Summary

Hannibal is an android hunter, a hired killer, strict and disciplined. For 12 years of service - not a single penalty, not a single reprimand. He lives alone, without burdening himself with connections and feelings, but everything changes when he meets a beautiful android named Will, who thinks he is human.

Chapter 1

Hannibal woke up a second before the Penfield's mood generator gave a ringing and joyful wake-up call. He stood up, stretched his whole body, reaching with the tips of his fingers to the plastic ceiling of his small room. Lecter moved a little, feeling the pleasure of the muscles filled with strength play. After washing himself, he went to the console of his Penfield and dialed in "active working mood." In fact, he didn’t even need a generator, Hannibal was already in a collected and optimistic mood almost everytime, he just liked order and stability, so he dialed this code every morning.

Lecter looked out the window, a small porthole made of solid transparent plastic in a white wall. The same white plastic walls surrounded Lecter on all sides. These rooms were granted to all the employees. The main advantage of this dwelling was its conciseness and restraint, which corresponded to the paradigm of the new world, as well as the presence of a protective layer, which, as the advertisement promised, did not allow radiation dust to penetrate inside. The sky was, as usual, covered with gray clouds, the lights of billboards flickered on the tops of empty skyscrapers, sometimes hovercars* flew by.

Hannibal had a quick breakfast, got dressed and patted his pet before leaving. It was a beautiful yellow-eyed cat of light gray, the so-called purple color. The cat was alive, real, not electric, which Hannibal was incredibly proud of. He worked for the police for many years to save up for a living pet. Lecter was an excellent killer, for twelve years of service he had not a single reprimand, not a single fine. His hand never slipped when it was necessary to eliminate objectionable, defective androids, as well as specimens with deviant behavior and rebels. A couple of times people also had to be eliminated, or rather, as Lecter believed, their pathetic and worthless excuse, born and grew up in the poisonous air of a ruined planet. This place, soaked through with radiation, daily watered with acid rain, devoided of sunlight, vegetation and clean water, Hannibal hated with all his heart. As well as his small, sterile, emasculated white room. He dreamed to collect enough money someday to move to another planet where those who could afford to emigrate lived.

The health of those who remained was subject to inevitable deterioration. Every time Hannibal took the tests, he dud it with anxiety and a nasty feeling ached somewhere under his knees. But so far, the tests showed that he was still safe and sound, that the radiation had not yet begun to corrode his body and mind, and he was still "normal", not "abnormal". And Lecter saved up, eager to leave before it was too late. "Emigrate or degenerate". Hannibal took on any job. In the evenings, lying awake, he imagined how he would live in his house, a whole house, with blue-painted walls, with a sun-drenched veranda, where you could put wicker furniture, and hang round pots with small bright flowers on supports. Around the house there will be a garden with fruit-bearing trees, in the very same house he will place many works of art: paintings and sculptures, seen in old books Hannibal somehow found during the liquidation of one object. Once he came to an abandoned house and found many unusual things there: covered with years of dust, crumpled or dumped somehow, they were exquisite and beautiful. This was the first time Hannibal had seen such things, and when he had completed his order, he looked at them in amazement and delight: carved candlesticks, elegant figurines with chipped details, drawings made with great accuracy. It was simply

amazing how it was not destroyed, but presented to the gaze of an ordinary hired killer. Hannibal felt the danger, as if he learned something that he should not have. He doused the house with a combustible liquid and set it on fire. He hid only one book with illustrations. Hannibal took it out occasionally to admire the glossy reproductions of paintings: the sea coast and white stones, yellow sunflowers blazing with the sun, early morning in a pine forest. Without knowing how, Hannibal literally felt how fresh and salty the wind blows from the sea, how pleasantly the sun's rays warm the skin, how spicy and warm the pines smell. Maybe these were childhood memories?

Hannibal was born before the W. W. T. and proved to be smart and fast enough to take a place in an underground bunker and strong enough to survive.

Hannibal continued to dream about his house: he would cook his own dinner from real meat, and decorate the table with fresh flowers. Of course, Lecter understood that all this was the fruit of his overly rich fantasy, that even on that planet there were hardly any livestock and flowers in abundance, but these dreams were so sweet and beautiful that he simply could not deny himself the pleasure and drew in his imagination pictures of his wonderful future again and again. And Lecter's main dream was a live horse, a magnificent long-legged horse or the one of the Percheron breed. Lecter loved his cat, he liked to watch the silent graceful movements of the animal, but the cat was too small, too domestic. The horse symbolized strength, beauty and freedom. Horses running in the expanse of endless green meadows, with a mane fluttering in the wind, this picture was imprinted in Hannibal's mind. When he was the photograph of these animals in the Sidney catalog fir the first time, he stroked the glossy, pleasantly smelling of printing ink sheet for a long time, looking at the picture admiringly. That day he set a goal for himself: to acquire this beautiful animal. After the World War Terminus, there were very few of them left, and they cost a lot, five thousand, only representatives of the elite possessed them. Lecter understood that his goal to buy a horse was audacious, almost unrealizable for a simple hunter, but Hannibal was not simple at all.

Chapter 2

Hannibal briskly walked down Lombard Street towards his place of work. Dove-gray flashes in the murky sky, barely visible from behind the skyscrapers, indicated what had to be dawn before the World War Terminus. There was so much rubbish underfoot, that Lecter had to stray off a straight line in order to get around especially large piles or boxes. A pleasant female voice broadcasting about the advantages of emigration was heard everywhere. On the huge screen a beautiful blond girl with big blue eyes and perfect skin gave sweetly affectionate speeches. Lecter stopped paying attention to such videos a long time ago, and the girl, most likely, was an android. He did not linger at the shop window with electric animals either, though out of the corner of his eye Lecter noticed the fluffy dark fur of a raccoon and his small paws with fingers put forward, clearly showing off, the colorful feathers of some large bird, the silky beige side of a dog that looked like a retriever. Hannibal smiled a slight sarcastic when he saw a dupe that was looking at the animals with his mouth open. A stranger took out the Sidney's Animal & Fowl Catalogue and began to look it through trying to find the cost.

Hannibal was not distracted by such trifles, did not spend money on that and despised these fakes, these ersatz animals. As real as they looked, they weren't the same, and they made Lecter disgusted.

Hannibal passed the monumental building of the Palace of Justice, entered the doors of the Police Department and went up to his office. It was a small room with a table, a chair, and a filing cabinet. The white blinds on the window never opened and there was nothing to see outside anyway. Before Hannibal had time to unpack his things, Harry Bryant, his boss, appeared. Harry was a lanky red-haired man with protruding ears. A strange choice of clothes made his appearance weirder: Harry always wore shapeless things, not for his body type. From the first glance at this awkward man, it was impossible to guess that he had a sharp analytical mind.

— Lecter, you have a new order, — Bryant began right off the bat as usual.

Hannibal looked inquiringly at the chief, who continued:
— There's been a brawl in San Francisco. Runaway androids. Some new, sofisticated mods. In appearance they are indistinguishable from humans.

— Will the Voigt test help?

— No, but the Russians from the Pavlovsk Institute supplemented the questionnaire. The new, improved version is called the Voigt-Kampff test. Here are all the materials.

Hannibal took the thick brown cardboard folder handed to him.

— Is this a test of empathy too?

— Yes, at the end of the key, there are written empathic reactions to a set of social situations. Most of them relate to the attitude towards animals. The point is that the reaction along the

reflex arc associated with the upper ganglia of the spinal cord. Reactions of andies are several milliseconds longer than in humans. This is very short. You have to study all the numbers as attentively as possible.

Lecter coldly looked at Bryant, who caught himself thinking that he felt extremely uncomfortable in the company of Hannibal. Bryant has seen a lot of cops, including android hunters. Some of them were silent and restraint, others were joking and swapping tales in order to get away from their exceptionally gloomy work. But Hannibal stood out among all. Always assembled, purposeful, executive. A flawless killer. There was something strange, something sinister in him.

Harry pursed his thin lips and decided to end the conversation:

— Okay, I'm sure there won't be any problems. Now you have to go to the Rosen Institute at the Tyrell company. You must get acquainted with the methodology of the test and try it out on androids of the same class as our fugitives. Here is the address.

Harry placed an ivory embossed business card on Hannibal's desk; the laconic inscription read: "Eldon Tyrell".

Tyrell's small business card showed nothing but his name and address, and that was enough. Eldon Tyrell did not need to prescribe his positions and merits, everyone already knew him. The head of a huge corporation that produced strong, productive, and aesthetically pleasing androids capable of a many activities, from mining to sexual services. Tyrell was one of the most influential people of the time.

Tyrell's assistant, a tall young man with blond hair and blue eyes, met Lecter in the hallway. They entered the elevator and Hannibal began to look at him imperceptibly: broad shoulders, long legs, graceful fingers. The classic beauty of a strict face. "A true Aryan", as they said in the twenty-first century during another terrible war, a very handsome man. 100% android.

An assistant escorted Lecter through a wide hallway to Tyrell's office. It turned out to be large, but rather modestly furnished, no elaborate carpets or sculptures. Eldon Tyrell got up from behind the large table and approached, his face expressed sincere benevolence:

— Mr. Lecter, please, come. I'm very glad to see you!

He held out his hand, which Hannibal shook. Tyrell's palm was dry and warm, and the handshake was quite firm. Eldon dismissed the assistant with a nod and offered the guest a chair in front of his desk.

— We really need your help, — he told. — You already know, I suppose: five androids have escaped from our lab. They are very dangerous and we want you to exterminate them as soon as possible.

Hannibal nodded.

— I can do it. At a good price, of course. If you're familiar with my track record...

— Mr. Lecter, — Tyrell interrupted, making Hannibal wince a little. — I know that you are one of the most productive hunters, that's why you were invited. The fact is that these are androids of the latest model, their intelligence is huge, but plus, they have the ability to imitate empathy, so they can easily pass the old tests.

— Mr. Bryant provided me with materials for the new Voigt-Kampff test.

— That's why you're here. Practice with our guys.

— Do you want me to test your androids?

— Yes, it is necessary for further work. You understand that a mistake can cost a person's life.

— Of course, I'm ready.

— Very nice.

Tyrell leaned back contentedly in his chair.

— Well, let's get started. Friedrich! — he called.

Hannibal turned as he heard footsteps. The same assistant that met him downstairs entered the room. The corners of Hannibal's lips curled up.

— The name suits him, Mr. Tyrell, — he told.

— Yes, Friedrich is accurate and punctual as a German, a very intelligent guy. Sit down, Friedrich, you will have to answer Mr Lecter's questions.

The assistant obediently sat down, he looked at Hannibal impassively. There was not the slightest sign of embarrassment or displeasure on his face. This was what distinguished androids from people — their absolute coldness, detachment. The androids had knowledge, information, a set of standard reactions, but they could not experience real emotions.

— Let's get down to business.

Hannibal opened his bag, took out the Voigt-Kampff testing device and started connecting polygraphic sensors to it.

— Can I see it too? — Suddenly, a voice came from the corner of the office.

Hannibal turned around in surprise and saw the high-backed chair, which had previously completely concealed the person sitting in it, rotate. The light of the table lamp illuminated him, and Hannibal saw a young man with dark curly hair. He got up and started walking towards him.

— Let me introduce Will Graham, my nephew. —Eldin said. — Mr Lecter, android hunter.

Will smiled affably, and Hannibal saw that he was a very pleasant-looking man. He had large greenish-blue blue eyes, a beautiful line of lips and a firm, manly chin. The soft curls that framed the face made it charming.

— I've never seen an empathy test done, — Will said, eyes blazing with curiosity.

— This sensor, — Hannibal held up the flat adhesive disk with its trailing wires — measures capillary dilation in the facial area. We know this to be a primary autonomic response, the so-called 'shame' or 'blushing' reaction to a morally shocking stimulus. It can't be controlled voluntarily, as can skin conductivity, respiration, and cordial rate.

He showed Will the other instrument, a pencil-beam light.

— This records fluctuations of tension within the eye muscles. Simultaneous with the blush phenomenon there generally can be found a small but detectable movement.
— And these can't be found in androids, — guessed Will.

— In androids, they do not appear as a reaction to "shocking" questions, although they are biologically possible.

Will thanked Lecter and lowered his eyes to the device. Hannibal checked the readiness of the testing machine and read the first question:

— You are at a restaurant with exotic cuisine. The waiter has brought a delicacy: a live monkey with an open skull. You can eat the brain of an animal.

— It's monstrous! I will not do it! — Friedrich answered.

– You are walking down the street and you see how children are torturing a dog, a real, live dog. Your actions.

— I'll call the police.

— You come home and find your girlfriend with another man. They are both naked and having sex. Your reaction.

— I’ll say we break up and ask them to leave.

Hannibal looked at Tyrell. He nodded his head. All reactions are correct, but no emotional response is noticeable, not the slightest sign of indignation or emotional pain.

— The last question. Your girlfriend got pregnant and told you that she is going to have an abortion.

– Abortions are prohibited – said Friedrich calmly.

— Well, I think everything is clear here, – Eldon said.

– Yes, Mr. Tyrell, all reactions are characteristic for an android.

– You can go, Friedrich.

The assistant got up, and Will immediately rushed into the vacant chair.

– Can I try it too? – he asked, looking at Hannibal longingly. His big childish eyes shone with eager anticipation.

Lecter looked questioningly at Tyrell.

– My boy, why are you doing this? – asked Eldon. He looked confused and worried.

– Uncle, please! I'm very interested!

Will batted his curled, doll-like lashes a couple of times, and Tyrell gave in. Graham turned his head, gleefully raised his beautiful eyes to Lecter. In his ear a small earring flashed. A small transparent stone in it shone so brightly in the light that – no doubt – it was a natural diamond. Hannibal smiled an ironic half smile and turned back to the instrument. Everything was clear, a handsome boy is supported by a rich uncle. A look of contempt crossed the hunter's face.

He prepared the device for a new test, approached Will and carefully attached the disk to his forehead. Lecter could not help admiring his incredibly long eyelashes that fluttered on Graham's white cheeks, painted with a sweet blush, rose tender lips. Will glared at him, eyelashes fluttering like butterfly wings, wet mouth open, and Hannibal averted his eyes hurriedly. Lecter cleared his throat, sat back down and started asking questions.

– You are walking in the woods and notice a fox caught in a trap. Its paw is badly damaged and bleeding. Your actions.

– I'll call the rescuers and try to free it by myself. Or at least loosen the grip of the trap so that the poor animal does not suffer from pain!

– What about the poachers who set the trap?

– I'll call the police! These criminals should be severely punished!

Hannibal saw Will's eyes widen in indignation. The device recorded the first changes.

– Next question. You have come to a restaurant serving crayfish. The cook throws them into a pot of boiling water, where the crayfish are boiled alive.

– It's disgusting! I won't eat them and I'll leave immediately!

Will's eyes burned with righteous anger, his breathing became heavy.

– You are being harassed by a person you don’t like, a man. He makes ambiguous hints, touches you.

Out of the corner of his eye, Hannibal saw Will wince a little and glance somewhere in the direction of his uncle's shoes when he read this question. Then Graham answered rather rudely:

– I'll let him know that I do not find him that interesting.

Will's voice sounded calm, but Hannibal noticed him slightly blush, and the device recorded an increase in his pulse. All reactions were instantaneous.

– Everything is clear too, your nephew is undoubtedly a man, – Hannibal said and saw the victorious look of Tyrell.

– You can go, my boy.

He put a hand on Will's shoulder, and the young man instantly drooped. He hauntedly looked at Lecter. Their eyes met for only a second, but Hannibal suddenly realized how hard it was for Will to live there. He seemed to be connected with his uncle not only by family relations. And far from pleasant ones. Hannibal noted this to himself, but immediately discarded this thought. It's not his business.

When Graham left, Tyrell sat in the same chair where his nephew and assistant had sat before, and in a low voice that sounded proud, he said:

– Will is not a human and not my nephew. He is a brand new android with a Nexus-Ten brain box.

Hannibal stared at him, dumbfounded:

– But his reactions... It's impossible!

– Possible! – Tyrell replied. – Our scientists were able to create an emotional block that can create physical reactions, such as blushing and so on. Moreover, they achieved the necessary speed of these reactions.

Hannibal shook his head.

– But how can one distinguish such an android from a person?

– Only by doing a brain analysis after death.

– And the runaway androids, are they ot the same type?

– Thank God no. They are "Nexus-six", well known to you.

– Fine.

They were silent for a while. Hannibal was thoughful, and Tyrell beamed a smug smile.

– Tell me, please. Are there any other examples like this?

– No, Will is alone so far. Unique. And... I think you understand, Mr Lecter, this is top secret. No one should know about such an android.

– He doesn't know himself, does he?

Tyrell pursed his lips into a snake-like smile and shook his head.

Hannibal nodded knowingly and began to get ready.

On his way home and after dinner, Hannibal kept thinking about Will. An android with emotions, it was amazing, unbelievable. Such a delicate work! The Tyrell lab scientists must be genius.

Will.

So beautiful, so unique. Incredibly, he gave the full impression of a man – Hannibal felt his warmth when he attached the device to his head. Lecter recalled accidentally touching his curl with the crook of his little finger, as if he felt its softness and silkiness again. Huge eyes with fluffy eyelashes, he saw them so close. His capriciously carved lips...

Hannibal shook his head. There, on the planet Tannhauser Gate, the settlers were given a personal android as an assistant. Hannibal would not refuse an exact copy of Will. And it’s not a fact that he would use his services only to help with the housework.

Chapter 3

The light of a table lamp with a stained-glass shade fell on the deep wine-coloured velvet curtains, the smallest particles of dust swirled in the stale air of the dark room. Will glanced lazily over the library, over the golden, black letters on the bindings of old books, paper and cloth, over the brown shelves made of solid oak, over the shimmering silver and bronze figurines and paintings on the walls. All books and works of art have been studied by him a long time ago, like everything else in this room. Will stood up, pushing an elegant table on which lay sheets of pencils away, he did not want to draw at all. Graham walked over to the piano, touched a few keys, listened to the high, brittle notes that filled the room. The owl sitting on the top cover of the instrument abruptly turned its head and blinked its huge eyes. Will raised his hand and stroked the soft feathers. The owl was real, it was Mr. Tyrell's gift. The last living owl, a real treasure.

Eldon Tyrell entered the room. He was a short man with a dark, deeply wrinkled face, and sly, laughing eyes hidden behind thick glasses.

How are you, my young friend? Is everything fine? he asked Will with a slight smile.

— Yes, everything is fine.

— Got bored? Tyrell asked, tilting his head slightly, and for a moment Will thought his eyes flashed.

— No, no, I ... was just playing a little.

— Well, music, this is wonderful. Will you play something for me?

Without waiting for an answer, Mr. Tyrell went to the back of the room and sat down on a comfortable leather chair. Will sat down on the round chair in front of the piano obediently and began to play a small lyrical scale. Tyrell sat quietly, watching the young man's movements. Will wanted to cringe under his gaze. His unkle was unfailingly kind to him. And Will knew he should be grateful. In the end, he was lucky that this businessman, the head of a giant corporation, took care about him after the death of his father, he gave Will shelter and education. Graham was not at all naive. Despite the fact that he did not leave his apartment at the top of the corporation tower, he knew what was happening below, and how people had to survive there. The young man had a sharp analytical mind, and scraps of information were sufficient to understand: a couple of phrases dropped by a guard, or a headline in a newspaper that he accidentally saw in Tyrell's office.

He knew that he was lucky to live here, in safety and luxury.

— You're doing great, my boy, — Tyrell said when Will had finished playing. — Now go to bed and have a rest.

Tyrell nodded towards the large bed with carved uprights, canopy and plenty of pillows. Will followed his gaze wistfully. He didn’t want to go to bed at all, and he wasn’t tired either, why would he be tired if he sat in this room all day ...

— Sleep, boy, then you'll tell me what you dreamed about.

Tyrell said it deceptively softly, but Will knew he shouldn't argue. Trying to suppress his irritation, he got up, went to the bed and lay down. Will knew that the Eldon would really ask him about his dreams in detail. Graham did not understand why, but Tyrell was very interested, especially in Graham's childhood memories: the old house, fishing with his father, walking the dog, his father teaches him how to fix a boat motor ... Also, Will was often asked to take various tests, answer strange questions. And Will answered. Despite the fact that he did not like either the tests or the oppressive attention of his uncle, he preferred to live like that than to be exiled and slowly degrade in abandoned houses imbued with radioactive dust.

But still ... There was something in the way Eldon looked at Will, touched the curly strands on his head, adjusted the collar of the patterned silk robe that Will, at his request, had to wear over his shirt and trousers. Something strange and creepy, as if Tyrell kept him there, like a beautiful living toy, like an owl that was still sitting on the lid of the piano.

Chapter 4

5 years ago.

Eldon Tyrell sat in his office and looked through the folders with reports. He was dissatisfied with the documents of the scientific institute of the company "Tyrel". The reports of his man, who works with the Russians and receives considerable rewards for industrial espionage, were also not encouraging.
Tyrell frowned, pressed the switch button, and ordered:
"Call Vogel to me!"

Klaus Vogel, a tall, very thin man with light blue eyes and colorless eyebrows, was the director of a scientific institute. He showed up at the boss's office exactly five minutes later.

"I don't like your reports!"
Tyrell told him right away. “I need a new, ultra-fast and emotional brain block that surpasses the developments of the Russians, and urgently!

Tyrell's voice echoed through the dark office. He seemed to have become larger, taller, and Vogel cringed, timidly stooping with every word.

"Let's figure it out. The report states that the project you are working on now has two and a half trillion elements and freedom of choice in a field of ten million possible types of brain activity. But the legendary Nexus Six had two million! So you've increased the items, okay, but why does the number of activity types stay the same? Russians have already created fifteen! And then, it's intelligence. We had enough highly intelligent androids, but now we need something fundamentally new. We need an emotional block, empathy. The ability to bypass tests".

“You see, Mr. Tyrell, this is such a subtle thing... The human nervous system"...

"I understand!" Tyrell interrupted him. “But I don’t pay you for work, not for lectures about the nervous system".

Vogel lowered his eyes.

"If you do not do what I expect of you, there will be others who will take the risk. We can lure someone from Russia. Remember: there are no irreplaceable people".

Vogel took a deep breath. He gave almost ten years of his life to work for the Corporation and the creation of androids. Ten years on Earth fucked up by radiation dust and acid rain. His health had deteriorated considerably, and he knew that it was only thanks to the patronage of Eldon Tyrell that he had not yet received the status of "a special". This terrible status would forever deprive him of the right to emigrate throwing away from the humans. Vogel ran a sweaty hand through his noticeably thinning hair, clasping his fingers together.

“I will do my best,” the scientist said quietly but firmly.
"That's better. I hope for quick results".

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The bright light of the spotlights blinded Graham's eyes, making it difficult to concentrate. Will repeated his lines over and over again, stumbled, muttered words of apology, and tossed his head again, looking into the camera's peephole, doing his best to make his face look at least a little friendly. His lines were:

"Emigrate if you want to live in the comfort of security".
" You will find clean air, water and clear skies on the Tannhäuser Gate. A better future for you and your children there".
"Take the test and take your chance for a better life! Emigrate or Degrade!"

Best boy grips changed the lighting, the cameraman tried a different shooting angle, the make-up artist ran up to tickle Will's cheekbones with a powder brush. The director asked Graham:

“Try to say it more seductively, more coquettishly!”

Will hated it all. He repeated the lines over and over again obediently. He completely ignored the director's requests but still felt himself like a talking parrot or a clockwork doll.

In the evening of the shooting day, Mr. Tyrell silently entered the studio door. Unnoticed by anyone but Will, he stood there, and Graham felt his attentive and approving gaze. Will knew there was a patronizing smile on his uncle's face, though he couldn't see it. Tyrell was an invisible shadow, hidden from the crew members by the bright light of the spotlights, but he was not a gray mouse, rather, a gray cardinal. Will felt great strength of mind and some danger emanating from this man. Graham didn't show it, but he was always on guard in his uncle's company. If Will could flee to the Tannhäuser Gate colony, he would have given everything to be there and never see Eldon Tyrell again.

Will spoke the text, and, having heard the "Stop, filmed!", He immediately threw off his mask of mock cordiality, wearily lowered his head, rubbed his eyes. On his way to his dressing room, he met the understanding and sympathetic eyes of a short, fair-haired girl with a simple but sweet face named Robin. She was the director's assistant, the most intelligent and executive, and also the only person who saw and understood Graham's suffering. During filming, they often exchanged a couple of phrases, and it was always a friendly and pleasant communication. If he was not under the strict supervision of Eldon, who forced Will to leave the building immediately after the end of filming, he would have gladly invited her to drink coffee with him, and perhaps they would have become friends ... But Robin was a good, kind girl, and Will would not wanted to put her at risk, so he hurried to lower his eyes and hide behind the door of the restroom.

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The hall of the Los Angeles Opera House struck with baroque luxury: golden stucco on the walls, scarlet velvet of armchairs and soft upholstery of balconies, a huge glass chandelier sparkling under the high ceiling. Hannibal decided to combine business with pleasure and came to the performance. He was looking for Ida Kampf, a singer. She was said to have a

unique voice, an incredibly large vocal range, excellent self-discipline and performance. Through his channels of informants, Hannibal had a whole staff, unofficially, of course, he learned that specific rumors were circulating about Ida. People who work with her note her coldness; they say that she was actually not a person, but an android.

Hannibal went to his place and began to observe people gradually filling up the hall. There were mostly people here, and androids as someone's assistants, like that young strong guy who accompanied the decrepit, smartly dressed old man. Lecter's trained eye identified them immediately. An old woman sat next to Hannibal, the top of her dress was decorated with stones and feathers, she wore large diamonds in her drooping ears . She was helped to find a place by a tall, modestly dressed girl, also an android. Hannibal turned away. These unfortunate old people obviously had money, but no longer had the health to move to another planet, so they surrounded themselves with the greatest possible luxury and comfort here. And there were many of them here. Hannibal glanced at the audience, dressed-down to the nines, looked up at the white-gold ceiling of the theater, imagined drops of deadly acid rain hitting the roof outside, and slightly chuckled: "A feast during the plague."

Finally, the third bell rang and the lights in the hall began to go out slowly. Heavy burgundy curtains parted to the sides, and the first chords of music sounded. They gave Madame Butterfly, one of Hannibal's favorite operas. Ida was truly magnificent: a strong clear voice flowed easily and freely, with beautiful modulations and excellent Italian pronunciation. However, it still lacked emotion. Chio-chio-san aria, full of love, longing for a loved one and expectation of happiness, demanded such an intensity of feelings that the android could never perform.

After the performance, Hannibal, used his documents to go to Kampf's dressing room. The singer has already to removed the Japanese wig, but remained in a kimono and a wide belt. Hannibal noted the impeccable shape of her petite head and her face with its large eyes and large crimson mouth. Lecter introduced himself and informed the artist about the need to take the test. The woman looked unhappy, but could not refuse. Hannibal attached the disk to her forehead, directed the beam into her pupil, and, involuntarily noticing that she did not radiate as much warmth as Will, began to ask questions, looking at the readings of the device.

Ida tried to evade questions, skillfully playing embarrassment or indignation, but the device could not be deceived. The reactions appeared a few milliseconds later than in humans.

"It's all right, there's no doubt you're human," Hannibal said to lull Ida's guard. Androids, even women, were very strong, and it was necessary to keep the effect of surprise as much as possible. Rising, he carefully peeled off the disc from the singer's forehead, then walked to the wall with posters of past performances, as if interested in them. As expected, Ida turned after him. Then Hannibal began to return to his place, as if accidentally pulling the table with his hip. He swayed, and Lecter asked with mock excitement in his voice:

"Hold it, don't let it fall!"

Ida's eyes and hands automatically rushed forward, while Hannibal recoiled back with lightning speed and threw a metal string around her neck. Ida wheezed when he began to tighten the noose, scraped her feet on the floor. Her fingers struggled to loosen Hannibal's grip, but it was completely useless.

It was all over very soon. Ida's body limply limp on the chair, her head fell on her chest, covered with a silk kimono with a picture of sakura. Hannibal looked at her indifferently, called Tyrell to report on the successful elimination of one of the androids and began to collect things.

Folding the device, Hannibal noted that everything went very easily with Ida. And then he remembered Will, how this amazing handsome boy bypassed all questions, involuntarily deceiving both the device and him, Hannibal, the android hunter. Lecter wondered if Will had heard their conversation with Tyrell. How did he feel about the destruction of androids in general? It would be interesting to talk to him. Very interesting.

Hannibal packed his things calmly and methodically. It was necessary to wait until the car arrived. It would deliver the body to the Palace of Justice for the examination of the bone marrow. Not feeling like sitting in the dressing room, Hannibal went out and gently closed the door. After the performance, a small buffet was organized, and Hannibal went into the hall to get himself some kind of drink. He was maneuvering between people, trying not to hurt anyone, when suddenly he heard:

"Mister Lecter!"

Hannibal turned towards the voice and recognized Tyrell. He, beaming with a contented smile, stood meters away from him. Hannibal arrived.

“Mr Tyrell, good evening".

“Indeed. I received a message that you have done your job".

Hannibal nodded silently.

“Honestly, I'm surprised. I didn't expect to see you here. Hunter and opera lover. A very unusual combination".

"I didn't think you'd be here either".

Watching the performance of the singer, knowing that after the performance she should be destroyed, it was rather cynical, even cruel. However, Hannibal did not say this aloud, because he noticed how someone approached them. Lecter turned and saw Will. He was wearing a navy blue tuxedo that set off his eyes amazingly and accentuated his slender figure. Even the frown on his face did not spoil his exquisite beauty.

"Will, it's very nice to see you," Lecter said sincerely.

Will muttered a greeting back, looking down at Hannibal's tie.

"Will doesn't really like theater or social events," Tyrell said in a parental tone, placing his hand on Graham's waist. Hannibal smiled politely at Eldon and fixed a careful look on Will's face. He looked avoidant and aloof, but Lecter noticed Graham's jaws tightened as he felt his uncle's patronizing touch.

"Don't you like small talk?" he asked Will knowingly.

He shot him a quick glance under fluffy eyelashes and replied:
"Exactly".

Will's tone was unfriendly, and he immediately lowered his eyes and frowned slightly. Hannibal smiled thinly. This boy seemed to be more and more interesting. Lecter wanted to break through his armor and see what was inside, he wanted to see how Will would behave in extraordinary circumstances.

"How do you like the performance?" he asked Tyrell.

"Fine, but not expressive enough. My favorite Cio-Cio-san is still Maria Biesu".

"Absolutely agree. She is beautiful. No one could so subtly and gently embody the inner world of a naive woman who lives by her love, expectation and joy of meeting".

Tyrell chuckled.

“You have good taste, Mr Lecter. Nowadays, few people are interested in the art of the Old World. Come with us, let's drink something better than they offer here".

Hannibal did not refuse, he appreciated good food and quality drinks, although he rarely had access to them. He believed it was only a matter of time.

Tyrell turned and, deftly avoiding the audience of the theater, went to a small door in the wall, which was immediately opened by an obliging android in livery standing nearby. They entered and found themselves in a small cozy room, obviously for VIP status guests. The walls were wood-paneled and adorned with sconces that cast a soft, cozy light. There were several elegant tables, a sofa and armchairs. Tyrell motioned for them to sit down, and Hannibal sat on the couch, Will in the chair across from him. Tyrell walked over to a huge globe on a stand. Lecter ran his hand over the surface of the couch curiously. Was this real animal skin?

“I see you liked the upholstery,” remarked Eldon with a sly smile. He opened the lid of the globe and took out a bottle of wine. “These are antique furniture made before the W.W.T."

Hannibal looked at Will. He sat absolutely unperturbed, looking into the corner of the office. His deliberate detachment and desire to avoid eye contact was beginning to irritate. Eldon approached and handed them two glasses of red wine.
Hannibal sniffed, held the drink in his mouth, then drank and closed his eyes, savoring the aftertaste. It was excellent.

"Thank you Mr Tyrell. The wine is great".

"Thank you Mr Lecter".

But Hannibal was already tired of this exchange of pleasantries. He did not take his gaze off Will, who was still looking at something on the floor of the room. Hannibal wanted to provoke him somehow, to draw his attention.

"You don't like eye contact, Mr. Graham?" Hannibal asked him bluntly.

Will raised his eyes somewhere in the region of Lecter's neck, answered through his teeth, as if reluctantly:
"You're right, I don't. Eyes are distracting. They show too much and at the same time not enough"

Hannibal narrowed his eyes in interest. Will answered rather rudely, but Lecter did not give up. This guy never ceased to amaze him.

"And the opera? Don't you love it too?" Hannibal asked.

"In general, no, but I have a couple of favorite arias".

"May I know which ones?"

"Nadir's Aria from "The Pearl Fishers" by George Bizet.
"Farewell, farewell, my dream ...". Indeed, a magnificent aria. I love it very much too," Hannibal said, smiling softly.

Will glared at him, a little incredulously, but not so angry now.

Hannibal noticed that Tyrell was watching them with an ironic smile and was silent, then Lecter continued his conversation with Will:

"Did you like today's performance by Ida Kampf?"

"Um, yes and no," Will replied reluctantly. "The voice is very beautiful, in terms of performance technique, everything is fine, even I appreciated it, but as for acting - something seemed to miss ... I don't even know, she sang too coldly and calmly. It didn't touch my soul".

Hannibal leaned forward, peering into the face of the interlocutor:

"Do you prefer art that evokes strong emotions?"

Will glanced quickly at him again and shrugged vaguely:
"Maybe".

Now he looked warily at Lecter, who relaxed back on the sofa and, gracefully playing with his glass, asked:

"Have you heard Nadir's aria performed by Russian singer Leonid Sobinov?"

Will shook his head, but Hannibal could have sworn there was a glint of interest in his eyes.

"Be sure to listen, this is the most heartfelt and emotional performance".

"Good," Graham replied, softening visibly.

"This opera is going to be shown next season, rehearsals are already underway. They say that the actors who play the main roles are very good. Perhaps we could go to this opera together".

"I don't find you that interesting," Will muttered. He frowned again and clasped his hands together.

"I'm sure that will change soon," Lecter replied, he was not embarrassed at all.

Tyrell approached and began to apologize for the rudeness of his "nephew". Will threw displeased glances at his uncle and pursed his lips. Hannibal saw something defiant, hidden deep inside Graham, and it was intriguing. Such subtle shades of emotion, of an android... A truly unique work of brilliant scientists. Suddenly, the thought flashed through Lecter's mind: if he was instructed to eliminate Will, he would do it with pleasure. The wine or the closeness of the beautiful young man had an effect and uninvited images flashed through Hannibal's mind: he throws a noose around Graham's neck, strangling him, just as he strangled the singer today. Lecter imagined Will's fingers convulsively clasping his hands, the silk of his hair pressed against his cheek, the sweet and subtle smell of sea freshness from his skin. Will's beautifully shaped lips open to inhale air, his back pressed against Lecter's chest and belly...

Apparently, Hannibal's look betrayed him, because Will looked at him warily and questioningly. Lecter blinked the images out of his head and hurriedly crossed his legs to hide his inappropriate excitement. It was time to say goodbye.

Hannibal finished his drink and, thanking for a wonderful evening, went to his room.

Leaving the theater, Lecter saw the singer's body, covered with a black tarpaulin, taken on a stretcher and loaded into an inconspicuous white van.

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The gravel slipped from under his feet and fell down with a dull sound. The sun burned mercilessly, draining strength, making the head heavy and limbs weak.
A sharp stone hit his shoulder, and Will shuddered involuntarily. Another scratched his back, a third hit his forehead, staining it with a thin stream of scarlet blood. Invisible enemies tormented everyone who made the Ascension, prevented from connecting with the Great Mercer, tested the body and will. The ascent was long and difficult, but Will kept going, knowing that on the mountaintop he would meet Him, the Universal Father, the idol and inspirer of all the people of the new post-war world. He longed to merge with his spirit, strong and generous, to enter the stream of absolute understanding and acceptance.

Will sighed, putting the empathoscope down. The session ended, and he almost reached the top of the mountain. Again. He loved these sessions. There, on top of the mountain, he felt free and alive. Often in his dreams, Will imagined the ascent to the very top, to a wide plateau, and a magnificent view: the clear bright sky, fluffy snow-white clouds, a fertile valley below, pleasing the eye with emerald grass and the blue ribbon of the river sparkling in the sun. The Father stands on the edge of the plateau with his back to Will, he wears a long white cloak, which symbolizes purity and impeccability. Will steps closer timidly and Father turns around. Will can't make out the features of his face, all he sees is a knowing, incredibly warm smile.

Will was bored with his involuntary imprisonment, but already resigned to loneliness. A few years ago, he was drawn to communication, to people. Graham almost became friends with one of Eldon's assistants, an intelligent and talented guy named Matt, but when his uncle found out about this, the assistant disappeared. Later, Will heard rumors that the guy was assigned the status of a special. It was shocking: Matt was young, smart, full of energy, his physical and mental health could not collapse in such a short time. Graham realized that his uncle had done it. The reason was jealousy or fear of losing his favorite toy. Since then, Will has tried not to get close to anyone. Even if it was difficult sometimes, like with this hunter, Lecter. If Will could, he would be happy to talk to him, but knowing Tyrell ... And Graham chose the usual tactics of behavior, corresponding to the image of a rude introvert.

Chapter 5

The next day Hannibal went for another android called Pirogov. It was made at the Pavlovsk Institute in Moscow.

Early in the morning Harry Bryant called him and said that his people found of Pirogov.
“Block 3967-C,” the inspector dictated. "Get there as soon as possible. You will be met by a W.P.O. agent Kramer. Be careful. Pirogov found out that we removed Kampf. He didn't show up for work, and he wasn't at home either. Information was received from one of the informants that a man resembling Pirogov was hiding in the suburbs, in an abandoned block".

Hannibal drank a glass of water and, without even having breakfast, grabbed a weapon, a bag with a device and left his apartment. Having received the task, the hunter must act quickly, otherwise he will not earn anything.

Approaching the desired area, Hannibal could not help noticing the ever-increasing amount of garbage. Garbage was a huge problem in the New World, and in order to keep the planet in a more or less habitable condition for the remnants of the population, it was necessary to get rid of waste.
The comedian Buster Friendly liked to joke, that the Earth is in danger of suffocating not under a layer of radioactive dust, but under a layer of its own waste.

The area was abandoned. Most of the houses were uninhabited. Their gloomy gray facades, open doors slamming in the wind, and dead billboard lights evoked melancholy. In some houses one or two people could live, most often "specials" or "anomals", people who were rapidly losing their health or mind due to the polluted climate of the Earth. Hannibal did not admit to himself, but he felt sorry for them, especially the "half-witted", miserable unfortunate people.

Leaving his car a block before block 3967-C, he began to approach the target slowly. Haning noticed the movement in the street on the right, he pulled out his gun and pointed it at a man who was walking towards him arms open.
“Mr. Lecter?” the stranger asked and introduced himself:
"I am Kramer".

Hannibal looked him up and down in disbelief. He was a middle-aged man with a triangular nondescript face, dressed in a cloak and hat. His clothes were discreet, his appearance was unremarkable, but his voice! It was a wonderful baritone, lyrical, surprisingly pleasant to the ear, evoking associations of something romantic. Such a voice should be voiced by heroes-lovers and noble robbers in the cinema.

Kramer showed his W.P.O. ID, and Hannibal nodded stiffly.

"Get to the car, please, I have to check you".

“No time for this! Pirogov is in the building, he is armed, but people still live there!"

Hannibal frowned:
"How many?"

"We don't know, but several apartments are definitely occupied. Our people have been watching the block since yesterday, they saw people here and light in the windows. Didn't Bryant tell you this?"

Hannibal looked at Kramer attentively. He was clearly aroused, pupils dilated, breathing a little deeper than usual. Lecter's trained eye was quick to pick up on such little things.

Hannibal shook his head and said dryly:
“Then let's go".

They began to move in the direction of the block indicated in the report.
"I've heard a lot about you, Mr Lecter" Kramer said in his melodic voice. “They say you are one of the most efficient hunters. How many andis did you liquidate?"
"About forty".
Kramer whistled.
"Yes, it's impressive. Taking off my hat. By the way, I wonder who denounced Pirogov?"
“I don’t know for sure, one of the specials".
"Ah, one of those.. Poor, poor people," Kramer sighed, and Hannibal relaxed a little. There was genuine sympathy in the agent's voice, and it didn't escape Lecter's attention. Androids are not capable of such feelings, which means that he is talking to a person.

They almost came to the block.
“Pirogov is said to be very dangerous,” Kramer told, drawing his weapon.
Hannibal noticed that he had a laser gun, an unusual model.
The agent noticed Lecter's interest.
“I got this gun on Mars. A gorgeous thing!" he explained.
"I haven't seen the gun like this before. It's strange, I know all kinds of weapons, including those used in the colonies", Lecter thought. And at that moment he understood: this may be a new development of Russian scientists! Then is not Kramer, but Pirogov himself. Hannibal closed his eyes for a second and took a couple of breaths. He should've show that he guessed. The ability not to lose his composure in critical situations, perhaps, made him such a productive hunter. It allowed him to stay alive. But today Hannibal slipped, distracted by the game and flattery of a stranger, lost his vigilance. And then Lecter realized that he had made another huge mistake - he had moved too far from his car, on the bottom of which there was a button that turned on the neurowave. Now he can't knock out the fake agent's gun.
At the very door to the block, Kramer-Pirogov stopped and waved his hand politely:
"Mr Lecter, please".
"Only after you" - Hannibal answered.

They looked at one another, then Pirogov briskly darted inside, and Lecter rushed behind a concrete bin filled to the brim with garbage, powdered with dust, and just in time, at the same second a shot rang out. Pirogov shot from the doors of the block. Fortunately, the bullet did not hit the hunter, passing just a couple of centimeters from his hip. Hannibal cursed and aimed his gun at the windows. But there were no more shots. It was bad, very bad. The android could hide in any of the apartments, on any floor of a huge abandoned block.

Hannibal looked at the facade of the building, the empty windows with broken glass, like an old man with a gapped mouth, windows, took out his phone and began to dial Bryant. But when he heard the beeps, he immediately hung up. If reinforcement troops come, he would have to share the bonuses with them. This was the last thing Hannibal wanted. He'd saved long enough to be close to emigrating, getting a home, an android assistant, and a live horse. He couldn't wait and work here for a few more years, it was too dangerous. If he loses his health or sanity, they will not let him go.

Hannibal looked around for something to use as a shield. Luckily there was a thick piece of wood that looked like a piece of some old furniture nearby. Hannibal took it and covered himself with it and, without getting up to his full height, quickly ran to the doors of the block. It was quiet, empty and dusty inside. Fragments of concrete and glass lay everywhere, and the doors of the long-unused elevator were covered with bizarre black letters of graffiti. The stairs were covered with a thick layer of dust. Lecter carefully examined them: no traces, so Pirogov was somewhere below. Or there was a ladder. Clinging to the wall and lifting up the weapon with the cocked trigger, Hannibal began to carefully move forward. He tried not to step on the fragments, not to reveal his presence with noise. So, slowly and carefully, he went around the entire first floor. Pirogov was nowhere to be found, and Hannibal did not find the second staircase. There was only one thing left: the basement. Hannibal cursed: there, in pitch darkness, Pirogov had a head start, because a person must get used to the darkness in order to distinguish the contours of objects, and the Android's vision automatically reconfigures to night mode at once. Of course, Lecter had a flashlight, but it blinds his eyes and makes him vulnerable. For just a few seconds but they can be fatal. And yet, Hannibal decided to take a chance. He turned on the flashlight and opened the door to the basement. He saw was a small ladder of five steps. Having descended, Hannibal immediately shone his light to the right in order to see the android if he was hiding on the side of the entrance, but apparently Pirogiv expected just these actions of the hunter. Feeling a burning pain in his left leg, Hannibal saw Pirogov jumping on him, and knocked him to the floor. Lecter's head hit the last step and he dropped his weapon. With one hand, the android began to beat him hard and angrily in the face, and with the other he squeezed Lecter's throat. Overcoming the sharp pain in his leg and head, Hannibal grabbed the android's hand, trying to release the unrelentingly tight grip, but, of course, it was useless.

Pirogov spat out the words:
"This is for you for Ida! That's all for you, you nasty dirty people"
In the dark basement of an abandoned house, his melodious voice sounded completely surreal.
“You think you are gods. Decided that you can create and kill us whenever you want. We are just things to you. Damn you!"

Sincere bitterness and pain sounded in Pirogov's voice. Hannibal would have been surprised if he hadn't been so close to death. He stopped trying to take Android's hand off his throat and began to fumble around the floor, trying to find a weapon. His splayed fingers skimmed the floor for a few seconds as Hannibal gasped under the android's grip, and finally found the familiar handle. Rushing to the side with the last of his strengths, he grabbed a gun and, lifted it and pulled the trigger. Lecter shot Pirogov straight in the head. The android fell, and Lecter sat up, rubbing his throat. After examining the body, he realized that a control shot was not

required, Pirogov was eliminated. Limping, Hannibal climbed up and wandered to his car. He had to call a car to transport the corpse.

The next day, Tyrell asked Hannibal to come to his office.
"Hello Mr Lecter. I see you've been hit hard," he said, surveying the bruises on the hunter's face.
"You are right, Pirogov almost managed to outwit me".
"There are three left," Tyrell said thoughtfully, as if to himself.
Hannibal remained silent, repeating to himself once again the names of the fugitive androids he was to eliminate: Gina, the android prostitute, Ray, the soldier and Ingrid, the doctor. He studied their files thoroughly. If purely physically there should be no problems with the female ones, then the soldier, huge, exceptionally strong, caused serious concern. Moreover, Lecter was injured. On the other hand, female androids have been working among humans for so long that they have become very good at pretending, and it will be incredibly difficult to recognize them.
Eldon paused and, sighing, as if deciding on something, said:
"These androids are very similar to humans, they can imitate human reactions. The manifestation of emotions. Recognizing them without a test is incredibly difficult. And a mistake, you know, can cost a lot — a person's life.
Hannibal silently nodded in agreement. Tyrell continued:
"You need help. Will will ride with you next time. I hate to let him go, but without his help, the new androids will kill you before you can send them to rest".
"But how exactly will he help me?"
"Will is head and shoulders above those andies. He recognizes them immediately" Tyrell said softly so that Graham wouldn't hear, leaning close to Hannibal's ear.

Hannibal looked back at Will. He was sitting in the far corner of the office, ruffled, eyebrows furrowed, eyes, as always, studying something on the floor.
"Don't you want to go, Mr. Graham?"
Will's eyes flickered to the side a couple of times. He seemed to want to say something, but didn't dare.
"Of course he doesn't want to, because it's incredibly dangerous," Eldon answered for him.
"And he has something to lose, am I right, my boy?"
Tyrell looked affectionately at Will, who pursed his lips, twitching the corner of his mouth a little. It was a micro gesture of annoyance, even disgust. Fortunately, Eldon did not see it, but Hannibal did. He looked inquiringly into the eyes of the young man, who, noticing that the hunter was looking at him, looked up. Reading the expression on Lecter's face, he realized that he unconsciously revealed his attitude towards his uncle, and fear appeared in his eyes. But Hannibal blinked slowly, trying to put on a soothing expression on his face. He seemed to say: "Don't worry, I won't betray you." The fear in Will's eyes was replaced by surprise, then timid interest. In fact, Will really wanted to go on a mission with Hannibal, madly wanted to get out of this tower somewhere, from his stuffy dark room filled with exquisite rare things that he hated with all his heart. Having learnt that Pirogov had almost killed Lecter, he brought his uncle to talk about finding three other andies and, skillfully playing on his uncle's vanity and his fear of ruining the reputation of the corporation, threw him the idea to involve him, Will, in the capture operations.
"I will go. If I'm needed to catch a dangerous criminal, I'm willing to take the risk", Graham said it quietly but decisively.

. "He is noble, my Will! He is brave!" Tyrell said with undisguised pride. “Well, even though it’s hard for me to let you go, but, as Father sees, this is necessary. Fortunately, you will be under the care of an experienced person".
Eldon put his hand on Will's shoulder and looked at Hannibal. Graham gritted his teeth as he felt his uncle's hand. He felt like a thing being passed from hand to hand. This infuriated him, and he stood up, shaking off Tyrell's small, pale hand, and for the first time looked at Hannibal long and openly. His gaze, direct and firm, with a share of anger and the desire to defend his independence, suddenly pierced Lecter to the core. At that moment, Will was filled with inner nobility. Hannibal could not think that an android could feel like that. They looked at each other for several long seconds, then Hannibal walked over and held out his hand to Will. Without looking away, they shook hands as equals.

Hannibal left with mixed feelings. On the one hand, he was jarred at the thought that he, one of the best hunters, would work with an android, on the other, he felt sorry for Will, he was clearly languishing under the wing of Tyrell. This irrational, strange pity and — Hannibal admitted to himself — sympathy for an Andy baffled him. He, who has always despised everything artificial and killed androids easily and without the slightest hesitation, suddenly liked a handsome guy who looked at him plaintively a couple of times. Lecter became angry with himself and made a promise to communicate with Will as detached as possible and not pay attention to his long fluffy eyelashes, sensual lips and soft curls.
Thinking about it Hannibal took a shower, undressed and lay down, having set the generator to the early morning and the mode of active work mood as he always did.

Chapter 6

Tracking down the other androids proved out to be difficult. According to the information received from one of the informants, Ray and Ingrid lived in one of the abandoned quarters. And there was no information about Jean.

When Hannibal and Will arrived at the quarter indicated on the tip, they did not find anyone. They realized that they had to examine the whole building. Hunters went around each floor methodically, they were carefully checking all the apartments, and they were lucky. They found a man called Isidor, a half-wit, an "anomal." He said he had glimpsed a large, blond-haired man and a short, dark-haired woman, but not lately.
A few days later they received a real gift of fate: one of Hannibal's agents reported that a certain woman, very similar to Ingrid, had recently appeared and began working in New York. This once huge and prosperous city, the center of attraction for people from all over the world, after the war became a haven for all those who could not emigrate: anomals and specials, unfortunate, crippled, war-disfigured people. Deprived of any hope for a normal future, they were forced to live out their days in a semi-abandoned littered metropolis, among radiation dust and under acid rain. A noisy, dirty, decaying city that had lost all its former charm, it still remained an alluring place for the outcasts and the doomed. Here you could find a lot of useful things to make your life more or less comfortable, here you could buy a variety of pleasures in order to forget about your bitter fate at least for a while. Volunteers also worked here, these brave people preferred to be here, on Earth and make life easier for all those who had to stay. They offered free food, shelter, and medical services to anomals and specials. Ingrid joined the movement while Ray worked as a nightclub security guard.

Having studyed the report Will and Hannibal decided to advance immediately.

Will sat by the window of the hovercar and watched the silver wing of Hannibal's flying machine skim over the bleak ruins. Before the war they were an upscale suburb of New York. Will reflected on the fact that this was the first time he had been so far away from Eldon. Uncle didn't want Will to go, but he did. He let him fly with Hannibal to New York, having admitted that together they can be very effective. Now Will felt a slight exhilaration from the fact that he had finally escaped the obsessive guardianship, at least for a while, and now he enjoyed the anticipation of the upcoming adventures.

Before taking off, Hannibal gave Graham a small gun and taught him to shoot, which pleased Will even more than he expected.

Approaching New York, Hannibal pulled the lever, lowering the car.
"Let's fly low, look for the announcements of the work of the volunteer organization," he told Graham.
As for the club, it was easier, it was only one here.

Will obediently peered into the surrounding cityscape. It was gloomy: empty houses, broken glass and mountains of garbage, occasionally people came across, undersized, with gray skin, all somehow crooked. They were dressed in ugly old clothes, wrapped around them in several

layers, as if they were wearing everything they had at once ... Will noticed several signs offering free food to the needy. Graham read the ad several times, memorizing the time and place of the next charity dinner: it was due in two days.

It was decided to first go on reconnaissance to the club where Ray worked. This place was called "CyberCat" and was located in the former industrial area of the metropolis. A large three-storey building used to be a workshop of some enterprise, now it has become a place for entertainment. Huge silver letters, signs and four-meter-high bas-reliefs in the form of robots with cat heads announced that the men had not made a mistake with the address. Hannibal landed the car not far from the entrance.

The stern, broad-shouldered androids who guarded the entrance did not want to let the hunters inside at first, but, having seen the paper from Mr. Tyrell, stepped aside to let them come in.

The club turned out to be a chic place to relax. Not everyone who stayed on Earth was poor. Many people, especially the elderly and wealthy, were so conservative that they preferred to stay, surrounded themselves with all the luxury possible. They could afford comfortable homes, the most effective air purifiers to live in relatively good conditions, and trips to such establishments.

Inside the club another world seemed to exist: the world of a stylish futuristic interior, loud cheerful music, beautiful young guys and girls, gourmet treats. Elderly men and women rested on cozy sofas with elegant gilded legs. There were tables with a rich selection of snacks, fruits and sweets, as well as bottles of expensive alcohol. Visitors were surrounded by beautiful girls, pretty young men or athletic muscular men, all androids for sure. Having recognized one of the clients as Eldon's business partner, Will hurriedly averted his eyes. A respected businessman, always severe and tough in negotiations, was now being fed strawberries from hands by a charming girl with lush red curls. The man's shirt was unbuttoned, revealing a loose, pale belly to the world. On a neighboring sofa, an elderly woman in an excessively open shiny dress stroked the thigh of a superbly built man. He only wore a bow tie and tiny black shorts. The woman smiled contentedly, brought a glass of champagne to her brightly painted mouth, exposing her flabby forearm, tied with a bracelet with huge stones. The second man stood nearby, helpfully holding a bucket with a bottle of sparkling wine and looking admiringly at the visitor.
In the next moment, Will practically bumped into someone, or rather, a certain guy literally ran into him, smiling fervently, and began to dance nearby, inviting him without words to join. It was a handsome dark-skinned android, with bleached curly hair, dressed in shiny shorts and a faux fur coat shimmering with all the colors of the rainbow and glowing with LED lights. The guy was almost pressed against Will, squirming to the music with his whole body, and Graham embarrassedly tried to pull away to avoid contact. Seeing this, Hannibal chuckled and, holding out his hand, gently but firmly pushed the dancer away. He obediently walked away and continued his dance movement further down the hall.

"Thanks," Will muttered, throwing a furtive glance at Lecter. Hannibal smiled a little and bowed his head: "You're welcome."

Immediately, a young blonde in a uniform with the logo of the establishment materialized in front of them. Her miniskirt showed off her long, slender legs, and her low-cut top showed off her ample breasts.
"Hello! Do you want to go to the table?" she asked, flashing a seductive smile. “I can keep you company this evening, or you prefer—”

She waved her hand in the direction where a pretty petite Asian and a luscious tall mulatto were standing. Both girls smiled as if on command, expressing their readiness to please the guests with all their appearance.

Will glanced at the girls and then immediately looked down, and Hannibal sternly replied to the blonde: "Not today, sorry. We're here on business".

The beautiful face of the girl took on an expression of attentive listening.
“We are looking for a man called Ray. He works here. Tall, strong, fair-haired, light-eyed, appeared recently. Do you know him?" Hannibal asked.
“No, I don’t know,” the girl replied evenly, immediately becoming coldly detached. “Sorry, I have to go".

The android turned around to leave. Hannibal grabbed her elbow, holding her back, and quickly glanced around the club. From the balcony of the second floor, a man in an expensive suit and with a small, dapper mustache looked at them. His dark hair was neatly combed. Will vaguely thought that an actor of the pre-war period looked similar. Hannibal realized that this was the owner of the establishment, which means that it was not worth trying to detain the girl in order to get information from her. Lecter unclenched his hand, and the girl who had stood by silently while Hannibal held her left.

Talking to the owner was also useless. If he kept a runaway android here — and only a fool could not guess who was in front of him — then he would not give out his address.
"Let's go," Lecter said shortly to Graham and rushed to the doors from which the waiters were coming from with dishes full of food.
It was necessary to act quickly.
The men entered the round-windowed doors that swung open from each other and found themselves in the kitchen of the club. The androids mostly worked here, although they were much less attractive than those who entertained the guests in the hall, and dressed much more modestly. Hannibal glanced quickly around the room, his eyes flickering over the creatures hunched over the cutting boards, over the stoves, where something was frying and sizzling, stirring the brew in large silver pots wrapped in puffs of whitish steam. It wasn't that he looked for. Finally, he saw the one he needed: a small man, ugly, hunched over and dressed in gray slubby clothes. He walked along the far wall of the kitchen and carried a floor brush in his hands. "The local janitor. A special", Will realized.

Hannibal rushed forward like a tiger, calling out to the little man. He turned to them with a frightened face and froze in place.
"Do you know Ray? Tall, strong blond?" Hannibal asked him, looming over the half-wit from above and fixing him with a fixed, demanding look.

A special murmured, then Hannibal grabbed his skinny shoulders and literally dragged him to the back entrance. The chef androids were looking on indifferently, and the owner's guards

hadn't shown up yet, so they had a couple of minutes to get information out of the fool. The next moment they were on the porch of the club, in a small alleyway where there were garbage cans.

"Where is Ray? Speak!" Hannibal snarled, tightening his grip on the special's shoulders.

“Today is not his shift,” he bleated.
Hannibal's eyes sparkled.

"Where does he live, do you know?"
“I don’t… I don’t…”
“Speak, or I’ll break your arm, put it in a trash can and close it there!”
" No, please, no! Not in the tank! Not again!"

"Not again", Will repeated his words. He was perplexedly watching this scene. "So he's already been there. It's not easy for specials to live on Earth…” Will's heart suddenly sank, he had already raised his hand to touch Lecter and ask him to act softer, when the janitor reported that he had heard something. He told that Ray lived in an abandoned block next door.

“That's better, but look, if you lied, we'll be back,” Hannibal threatened the unfortunate janitorat last and let him go.

At that very moment, the sound of footsteps started to be heard outside the door. Obviously, it was the guards who fled. Lecter drew his gun and told Will to run to the car. As he was running several shots were heard behind him, the words of a curse sounded, it was Hannibal, who caught up with him.
A minute later they were already taking off over the dirty street that led to the club. Will breathed a sigh of relief. He felt uneasy in this strange and noisy place at the sight of half-naked dancers and androids unambiguously offering themselves, he felt sorry for the unfortunate janitor. But running away from the guards, knowing that Lecter was covering his back, he suddenly liked it. He was still on edge when the car came down near the house where Ray supposedly lived.

When they began to inspect the apartments, they did not find anyone. The house was completely empty and full of garbage, different things that were left by former residents. They had no more leads, the way back to the club was now booked for the men, there was only one thing left: to hide and wait for Ray to appear. Examining the ground floor Hannibal found a small utility room. It was located directly opposite the entrance and would have been an ideal place for observation and a surprise attack on anyone who entered this building, if not for one obstacle: the door was securely locked.

Pulling on the lock hanging on the door, Hannibal hissed annoyedly, turning away from such a convenient, but inaccessible room, and stumbled upon Graham's joyful smile. Lecter raised his eyebrows questioningly, and Will suddenly took a paper clip from his pocket and said: "Let me try!"

Hannibal smiled and walked away, giving Will place to act. Graham squatted down by the door, straightening a paperclip and slipping the end of it into the hole in the lock. After a

couple of minutes something clicked, Will removed the lock and showed it to Hannibal with a victorious smile.

Lecter looked at the lock on Graham's palm, tried to open the door, and when he did, remarked approvingly:
"You seem to be full of hidden talents".

Will smiled charmingly.
"When you live with a man like my uncle..." he said.

Hannibal returned his smile and peered inside. The small room was a place to store a mop, a couple of buckets and shovels, there was enough place for an ambush. Hannibal and Will went inside, closed the door behind them, and waited. The first half hour passed in awkward silence, then Lecter suddenly asked:
"What would you like to do if you had complete freedom of choice?"

Graham thought a while.

"I don't know, I would like to do something useful. Maybe fix some things, or ... or at least take out the garbage. I would like the world around to become better. Cleaner"

Hannibal paused, looking at the outlines of objects in the darkness and the curly head of Will, who was a little shorter than him. Lecter suddenly realized that he felt sorry for Will, felt sorry for an android for the first time. The guy thought that he was a man, he was ready to do anything, even a dirty work, just to escape from his golden cage. Hannibal pursed his lips, he didn't know what to say.

"And you? You're leaving soon, right? Are you emigrating to the Tannhäuser Gate?" Will asked, turning to face Hannibal. Lecter did not see, but felt his eyes on him.

"Yes, I planned to. If everything works out with your uncle's order. And how did you guess?"

Will chuckled.
"Well, it wasn't difficult. Everyone wants to go there".

Hannibal smiled slightly.

"And…" Graham continued. "You have been working here for twelve years, you must have saved up something. You have not yet fallen into the category of "specials", but you are afraid of this and, most likely, you are not going to spend an extra year here".

Lecter nodded his head in approval, showing that Will was right.

"Wait, did you study my biography?" Hannibal asked and it sounded more coquettish than he intended.

"Eldon has a file," Will replied casually, but Hannibal could tell from the slightly trembling tone of his voice that Graham was embarrassed, and Lecter's smile grew even wider.

They sat a while, silent again. Hannibal found it funny how this boy could see him. He was indeed a very talented guy. "Good model, ingenious design," Hannibal corrected himself. “What a pity that he is not a man,” an unbidden thought popped up. It was regret with a touch of bitterness. In recent years, Hannibal did not think about forming a couple with someone. Not with his lifestyle. Not with his experience. And who would want to bind fate with a hunter. People in the colonies… Hannibal often saw them in advertisements. The TV showed bright houses of the colonists, perfectly flat lawns with pink flamingos and colorful flower beds. Representative middle-aged men and neat blondes in pink dresses drove shiny new cars. Their white-toothed smiles shone on their flawless faces. They showed their homes and talked about how easy it is for them to run a household here, because every colonist has an android assistant. Exemplary children with perfect hairstyles obediently smiled at the camera, raising their heads from notebooks with homework or from a violin leaned to a small shoulder. All this had a tinge of puppetry, unreality, especially if you look through a tiny window and see all the dullness and dirt in which Hannibal had to work for many years to ensure a trouble-free life for people on Earth and in the colonies. Videos about the housing of the colonists were replaced by people talking about their professions. A teacher, a doctor, a lawyer, a builder, a psychologist, an obstetrician — they all were happily to say about the new happy society of the Tannhäuser Gate. A respectable, good society with no place for a murderer.

Will... so charming and smart. At first, Hannibal tried not to communicate with him much, not to look at him. Lecter was annoyed of being given an assistant, and an android, too, but he could not help being attracted to Will. This made him even more angry with himself. But then, giving in to the soft unobtrusive charm of Will, Hannibal became more and more willing to communicate with him. And it was easy, pleasant and right. With Will, he smiled as much as he hadn't in ten years. If only Graham were a human and not an android! Hannibal would have simply stolen him from his uncle and taken Will with him to a new life on a distant planet. But it was impossible, and it was not worth dwelling on these thoughts.

Finally, the front door creaked, and a very large man with blond, as if bleached in the sun, hair entered the entrance. There was no doubt: it was Ray.
He went upstairs, Hannibal and Will silently following him behind. Having noticed the apartment the android had entered, Hannibal returned for a suitcase with a Voigt-Kampf device. They went to Ray's door and knocked.

The door opened and Hannibal spoke:

"City Inspectorate, hello! By order of the authorities, we check all new tenants on a special device, may I enter?"

Ray glanced at the guests and self-confidently stepped aside, making way. Passing by, Will felt waves of power and blind fury emanating from the man.

Ray agreed to take the test, but avoided answering, ironically, confusing. The device showed ambiguous values. Graham, who was watching this, realized that Lecter was in a quandary. Then Will came up and, touching Hannibal's shoulder, suggested in a low voice: "Let me go on".

Lecter turned around in surprise, saw the determination on Will's face and, unexpectedly for himself, stood up to make room for Graham.
Will stared at Ray, who gave him a contemptuous look and bared his teeth, showing even white teeth.

Graham started asking questions. Hannibal noticed that he read them out of order, but looked for the toughest ones, following each one with a piercing look into Ray's eyes. Will ran the test aggressively, quickly, he literally bombarded Ray with shocking questions, not giving him a break. It reminded Hannibal of the way a knife thrower throws blades around a victim crucified at the target. And at some point, Ray got caught. After one of the questions his reaction appeared a little later than the normal reaction of a person. Will looked triumphantly at Hannibal. Excited by this verbal duel, with a blush filling his cheeks and wide-open burning eyes, Will was truly beautiful. Hannibal involuntarily stared, and this hitch nearly cost Lecter his life.

Noticing that those who called themselves inspectors were distracted from him, Ray got up and threw a table at Hannibal, hitting him on the wounded knee, rushed at him. Lecter writhed in pain on the floor, but was still able to draw his gun and aim it at the android. Ray growled with rage, took out a curved knife, dangerously and sharply flashing in the light of a cold white lamp, and raised it over Lecter.

Will, seeing that Hannibal is having a very bad time, rushed at Ray. At first, Graham grabbed his hand, trying to pull it away from Hannibal's throat, but it was useless. Ray's huge arm, filled with iron muscles, was like a stone. And then Will brought his other hand back, to the pocket of his trousers, where was a small gun, given to him by Hannibal at the beginning of their expedition. The next second, a shot rang out. Lecter, who hadn't seen Will draw his weapon, flinched as Ray's blood splattered across his face. The android pressed his hand to his neck, trying to clamp the wound, looked shockingly into Lecter's eyes. In Ray's eyes, so bright that they seemed almost transparent, pain and horror froze. The android did not want to die, and this suddenly pierced Hannibal's soul, but he immediately coped with unnecessary emotion and, pushing weakening Ray away from himself, got up. Ray's broad chest was still barely perceptibly heaving, but his eyes were already expressing resignation to fate. Hannibal hated this about the androids: knowing that they were caught, they behaved like sheep to the slaughter, while people, for the most part, did not stop fighting until the very end.

Now this resignation to the fate could be turned to his advantage, and Hannibal asked Ray a question: "Where is Gina? Do you know?"

Ray nodded.

"Speak!" Lecter demanded.

“Tomorrow morning… she’ll come… here…” Ray said with his lips, froze.

Hannibal gingerly grabbed the android's wrist, lifting his eyelids to shine his flashlight. There were no signs of vital activity. Then he turned to Graham, noticed that he was breathing heavily, his eyes on the android, and still aimed at the body sprawled on the floor. Hannibal walked over and stood beside him. He carefully grasped his gun and gently touched Will's fingers.

“That's it, Will, it's dead".

Graham looked at Hannibal, his eyes glowing with feverish fire, his fingers clenched tightly around his weapon. Lecter lightly ran the pad of his thumb over them, stroked them, reassuringly, nodded his head persuasively, not taking his eyes off the blue eyes opposite. Then he slowly tilted the muzzle down and took the gun from Graham. As if waking up, Will exhaled, stepped back a couple of steps and, patting his pockets, asked: "So now what? Should we call patrol to take the body away?"

“No, this can draw attention to this house, so we’ll drag the body to another apartment, we ourselves will stay here and wait for Gina,”

Hannibal answered, putting both guns in a holster and starting to pick up the scattered parts of the device from the floor.

And so they did. After hiding the liquidated android in the next apartment, which was carefully locked, they returned, tidied up a bit and found a fairly comfortable clean bed in the room, and a case of beer in the kitchen. Taking a bottle each, the men sat on the bed to rest a little. They didn't turn the lights on, and the room was lit only by the lights of the billboards outside, they flickered, making bizarre shadows dance on the opposite wall.

"How are you?" Hannibal asked after a few minutes of awkward silence. "It was your first kill..."
“Yes, I ... I'm ok” Will smiled shyly.
"What do you feel about this?" Lecter asked softly.

Will laughed out loud:
“God, you sound like a real psychotherapist!”

Laughing, Graham added:

"Don't psychoanalyze me, you won't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed"

Still smiling, he looked at the half-faded coverlet on which they were sitting, found a thread sticking out and began to wind it around his finger.

Hannibal stared at Will's profile, illuminated by the lights of the advertisements, and suddenly realized that for the first time they were in a relaxed atmosphere alone, were so close. Graham was truly magnificent: clear fair skin, a firm jawline, sensual lips, a scattering of soft dark curls and eyes that were huge, blue-green, with long eyelashes coquettishly curled at the tips. The look of these eyes could be incredibly languid and seductive, and Will did nothing to achieve such an effect, he just looked thoughtfully somewhere, this sensuality was created by the very line of his curved fluffy eyelashes.

Lecter often admired Will's beauty stealthily, and more than once caught himself thinking that he could immediately guess that this guy was an android, because nature could not create such perfection.

Feeling that he was being watched, Will turned and stumbled his eyes on Hannibal's greedy gaze, glittering in the semi-darkness. And Lecter suddenly decided not to look away, he went on staring at Will directly and frankly and Graham read desire in his eyes. The air between them thickened, filling with something exciting and hot.
Will opened his mouth, then suddenly leaned forward and pressed his lips timidly into Hannibal's mouth. Before he could react, Graham pulled back, lowered his eyes in shame, blinked rapidly.

“Sorry, I… I’m sorry, I’ve never… God, I’m so ridiculous!”

Will sounded annoyed and angry with himself and Lecter hastened to assure him otherwise. He gently touched Graham's cheek with the palm of his hand and said softly:
"Easy, Will, easy. You are not stupid at all".

Graham looked up at him, surprised that the hunter didn't push him away.

"You're beautiful," Hannibal whispered, and gently touched Will's lips with a kiss. He grabbed his upper, capriciously and sharply defined lip, squeezed a little, touched the tip of his warm, wet tongue. Graham returned the kiss willingly, passionately. He clung to Hannibal with his whole body, and kissed so clumsily that it touched Lecter's heart. Hannibal was accustomed to the obliging, artificial passion of android prostitutes, whose services he had to use from time to time to give his body a release, but he never felt genuine passion for any of them. But it was different with Will.

From the first meeting, Hannibal remembered his big bright eyes, sensual lips, dark locks of hair, which he was now squeezing in his palms. He had always longed madly to touch him, and now the boy was in his arms. Hannibal's other arm was wrapped around Will's back, feeling his slenderness and suppleness as Graham arched up against him as tightly as he could, and it turned Hannibal on like never before. Emboldened, Will put down his bottle and took Lecter's drink away, then began to take off his jacket, and Lecter willingly helped, freeing his hands. Then Hannibal unbuttoned Will's shirt, leaning down a little, pressed his lips to the soft skin of his collarbone, kissed down to his chest, cupped his lips and licked the nipple. Will let out a low moan of pleasure, tightening his grip on Hannibal's shoulder, and Lecter suddenly realized that he was caressing the body of an android for the first time. With Will, so many things were new and completely different... Hannibal put his hand on the waistband of Will's trousers and froze, looking at him questioningly. Thus, he gave Graham the opportunity to stop. But Will was clearly determined to get the most out of the night.

He nodded silently and, stretching, began to unbuckle Hannibal's belt. The next second they found themselves on the bed half-dressed, tightly pressed to each other. Their dicks slid over each other in Hannibal's strong and confident grip, arms and legs intertwined, and tongues and lips touched in a passionate and hot dance. Hannibal couldn't stop looking at Will's face, illuminated by the advertisement lights, filled with sincere wild pleasure. Hannibal himself was choking with passion, catching Will's every breath and moan, endlessly kissing his sweet carved lips, then his white long neck, slightly biting his delicate skin. A few minutes later, Will came, with a large shudder all over, and widening his eyes in surprise. He looked directly into Lecter's eyes and was so touching, defenseless and sincere, which pushed

Hannibal over the edge. He moaned loudly and shuddered from the powerful orgasm that came at the same second.

After they had some, hugging. Hannibal did not know what Will was thinking, but was felt previously unknown tenderness.
"You are," Hannibal whispered, burying his face in Will's neck, where there was a small bite mark.
“So sensual, quivering, so amazing,” Hannibal could have said, but no words came out, remaining deep in the soul and heart of the hunter. And he just kissed Will on the shoulder.

**
The morning was awkward. In the light of day, all the magic of last night was lost. The ruthless gray light revealed the rubbish and dirt of an apartment long abandoned by people. Will peeped into the cupboard with disgust, found a relatively clean cup, and apprehensively turned on the faucet. As expected, there was no water. Then Hannibal silently handed him his flask. Graham murmured his thanks and began to drink.

Lecter, seeing that Will was avoiding direct eye contact again, decided to clear up:
“Listen, about yesterday,” he began, and saw Will lower his flask, staring at him, eyes big and frightened.
"Everything is fine. I had a good time, I hope you too", Lecter said.

Will nodded timidly, blushing to his ears.

“It happens, you know, after seeing someone else die, you often want sex,” Hannibal continued. “It doesn’t oblige you to anything, okay?”

“OK,” Will replied.

At that moment they heard a soft knock on the door. Hannibal gave Will a quick, warning look, then drew his gun from its holster. Will understood him without words and took his weapon, which lay at night by the bed. Lecter went to the door and stood on one side, Will on the other. Gently turning the handle of the lock, Hannibal unlocked it. The door opened and a tall girl with short blond hair entered the apartment. She was dressed in a modest waitress uniform—a gray shirt with a second-rate cafe logo and a baggy midi-length skirt—that didn't hide her beauty at all.

The girl had wonderful figure and a beautiful face: big eyes, a small straight nose and sensual scarlet lips corresponded to the canons of classical female beauty. The mouth was, perhaps, a little too big, but this gave her a certain zest, making her appearance not ordinary, but memorable. The impression was spoiled only by the awkward short haircut, which she apparently did herself after the escape, trying to become less attractive. The girl stared in fright at Hannibal, who was aiming at her, and Will darted behind her and grabbed her hands.

"Who are you? Let me go! I will scream!"
"Are you Gina?"
"Yes! Where is Ray?"
"He will come soon".
"Come in, sit down, you need to do a test. Will,” Lecter demanded.

Graham nodded and pulled handcuffs out of his pocket and put them on the girl's hands. She obediently went up to the table and sat down, let the disc stick to her forehead, and then asked:
"What is it for? You are hunters, right? You killed Ray, didn't you?"

There was so much bitterness and doom in her tone that even Hannibal felt uneasy.
“We loved each other, we were a couple ...” Gina continued sadly, not addressing anyone in particular. She sat with her shoulders down, all drooping, indifferent to everything around. Hannibal and Will looked at each other: are androids capable of affection? Especially for love?

Gina continued. She seemed to want to tell.
"He cared for me, accepted me for who I am despite what I was doing ... He respected me, you understand? And you people, all of you treated me like a thing!"

Gina's voice broke into a scream. Will froze. He understood too well what it was like to be held by a beautiful thing...
"I'm sorry, Gina, but you and Ray broke the law and—"
"Law? We just wanted to live in peace. Do not hunchback without days off in the mines, do not serve lustful customers, but simply live calmly, peacefully. We didn't touch anyone!"

Will bit his lip and looked at Hannibal. He saw the sympathy in his eyes and shook his head slightly. But Will walked over to Gina and put a hand on her shoulder in a reassuring gesture. Immediately, the girl's eyes blazed with furious anger, she pulled out a small sharp knife from the belt of her skirt and dodged, tried to hit Graham, but did not have time. Seeing that Will was in danger, Hannibal drew his gun in a lightning motion and shot Gina in the chest. She shuddered and began to sag in her chair. Her eyes were still burning with hatred as she spoke her last words:
"People. I hate you all…"

Hannibal walked up to Graham and gave him a quick look. Convinced that he was all right, and seeing how his shocked expression changed to grateful, he returned to Gina, who was still whispering curses, and making one quick movement twisted her neck.

***
They went back in L.A. and Will briefly told his uncle about his and Hannibal's work together. Of course, Graham didn't mention that Gina almost hurt him. Eldon was satisfied, Will hurried to his room. He wanted to be alone.

In his room, Graham lay awake for a long time and replayed the events of the past days in his head. He was surprised to realize that he had never felt so full of energy, so free and alive, as during the hunt with Hannibal. Will recalled how he shot Ray, what strength and power he felt then. The way Hannibal urged him to hand over the weapon, the way their fingers intertwined on the barrel of the gun for a moment. How Lecter saved him from Gina's knife. How he literally brought down on him an avalanche of sensual and surprisingly tender touches, when he caressed his body and how he looked at him after sex. Graham looked back on his time with Hannibal every day, regretting that after each night the images of past events grew more and more faded. He was secretly hoping that another opportunity to repeat it all would arise.

One night he dreamed of Climbing again. Earth and gravel fell from under his feet again, and the sun blinded his eyes. This time, the invisible tormentors raged particularly hard, literally bombarding him with sharp stones, but Will stubbornly went up, with all his heart trying to merge with The One who always understands, forgives and accepts everything, with whom you feel whole, loved and needed, you feel that you belong here. When Will climbed onto the plateau, his cheek and hands were literally covered in blood. Strangely, he didn't feel pain. With a heart that trembled with timid joy, the young man approached the Father. He turned, raised his hand, and tenderly touched Will's cheek. Will clung to the warm palm, felt the soothing caring warmth, and finally saw his face. He had remarkably youthful skin, high cheekbones, big sensual mouth and hazel eyes. The face of Hannibal.

Chapter 7

The pencil slid over the rough paper, making a soft sound that was pleasant to Eldon Tyrell's ear. The head of a huge corporation spent his leisure time in his pet’s room and watched him draw. Tyrell knew that Will loved to draw, even though his sketches were far from professional level. Graham usually depicted things he saw in books: animals, statues, beautiful buildings, scenes from legends and myths...

Eldon patted his hand and stroked the armrest of the chair, upholstered in real bull leather. A high-quality, high-status thing, made even before the W.W.T., and in modern times absolutely scandalous.

Tyrell looked around the room with a relaxed and satisfied look: everything here had been carefully and lovingly collected by himself at closed auctions or bought from private collections. Every painting and every figurine he found or won from other buyers was his small victory, each one warmed his soul, they were all the embodiment of grace, luxury and success. Sometimes it took several years to find a particular piece of art or furniture, but Eldon knew how to set goals and achieve them. Methodically and persistently, he created his collection. If something had its own history, Tyrell valued it even more. For example, a small watercolor painting depicting a turquoise sea and a small sailboat near white rocks was very dear to the previous owner as a memory of her parents who died during World War II. This was the only thing left from them, and the old woman literally cried when she gave it away. She had to sell her belongings, including the painting, so as not to die of hunger. Tyrell especially loved purchases like this.

He dedicated his entire life to creating androids. When the production and release of the first models, far from the current perfection, began, Eldon, then an ordinary engineer at Rosen’s company, immediately realized that electronic assistants were the future and began to bend over backwards to move up the career ladder. Soon he took the post of thr
e head of the company, renamed it and acquired several smaller companies. Using androids, which under his leadership became more and more functional and attractive, Tyrell made a huge fortune for himself, becoming one of the most influential people of his time, a living legend. The man smiled contentedly. As a child, he was a small, frail and unattractive boy from a poor family, who was often teased and not rejected by his peers. But in fact, the reason for this was, of course, not his appearance or patched clothes, but his harmful, vindictive character, but Eldon drove these thoughts away, promising himself that he was simply not understood. He decided to succeed at all costs and show everyone what he really is. And so Tyrell did it, became an incredibly rich and influential businessman, surrounded himself with rare and incredibly expensive things. Every suit from his personal tailor, every rare car and work of art purchased by Eldon warmed his soul no less than the multi-million dollar figures in the company’s profit reports. Tyrell looked around the room again, his gaze slid over oil paintings and mahogany furniture, elegant ivory figurines, dishes from the finest Chinese porcelain. Truly a luxurious home! And Will...

Eldon's eyes warmed as he turned his gaze to Graham. On the young man’s hand Eldon saw his recent gift: a massive ring with a large bright red ruby. It was worth a fortune, and Tyrell

gave it to Will in gratitude for the successful elimination of the fugitive androids. The glare of electric candles in an antique twisted candlestick cast shadows on Graham's face, emphasizing the beauty of his features: large eyes with fluffy eyelashes, chiseled cheekbones and an impeccable jawline, a neat nose and sensual lips. “My boy, my beautiful boy, he is a magnificent addition to this room,” thought Tyrell and rose from his chair to go over and see what exactly his favorite was drawing. Will instinctively jerked his hand, as if wanting to cover the sheet, then leaned back in his chair. Eldon's face fell when he saw Graham's drawing: a long-legged, strong man depicted sideways, muscular arms clutching a weapon, one leg extended forward in a comfortable and aggressive stance, long blond bangs falling over his face. It was easy to spot Lecter in him.
Tyrell grabbed the sheets and looked through them one by one with growing indignation. He saw a sketch of hands clutching a pistol, a winged hovercar, and finally a large portrait of Hannibal, executed amazingly accurately. Eldon turned pale, then turned to Will, met the direct and impudent gaze of his blue eyes, and suddenly noticed something red on the young man’s neck. Quickly grabbing the collar of Will's shirt, he pulled it down and saw the bite mark.

— "What's this? He...? He did it..."

Will still looked at him silently, there was not a drop of remorse in his eyes. Eldon took a sharp breath. Anger flooded him in a hot wave, his fingers clenched the drawings, and, looming over Will, he roared:

— "What have you done? Do you even know who you are?"

— "I know who I am! “Will clenched his fists, and the veins began to play on his wide cheekbones. — "I am Will Graham, son of Robert Graham...

— "No, boy, you are an android of the latest experimental model, the property of the Tyrell corporation! We created you a couple of years ago as part of a new experiment with the Nexus-10 brain block and left you to participate in advertising and attract new colonists,” Eldon hissed, narrowing his eyes angrily.

Will looked at his guardian in shock and shook his head:
— "This can’t be true! You're lying!"

Eldon smiled calmly and mercilessly. He felt like he was in charge, sat down on the edge of the table and asked:

— "How long do you remember yourself clearly? Two years? Yes, because you only exist for this time!"

— "No! I remember my childhood, my father!"

— “This is because the brilliant Vogel introduced a synthetic memory matrix into your brain, false memories,” in the heat of the conversation, Tyrell himself did not notice how he let it slip, calling the scientist’s last name, and Will noted from the corner of his consciousness that he needed to remember it.

— “It wasn’t difficult at all.” But to create a unique emotional block that can pass any tests, including the Voigt-Kampff test*! It was a real breakthrough! At the moment you are the only one in the world, do you understand?"

With trembling hands, Will pulled out a small square photograph from his left shirt pocket, which showed a boy with dark curly hair and a smiling, light-eyed man with an intelligent face. Will really only remembered the last couple of years well, and this photo was the only connection with his past.

Tyrell nodded understandingly and explained:
— "The boy in the photo is my nephew. I took this photo from his album. He looks a little like you. But not so beautiful".

Tyrell paused and then continued:
— “Do you think you'll still need that Lecter of yours when he finds out what you are? He is a mercenary, a paid hunter of androids. Of creatures like you.

Graham clenched his teeth. He was silent, only his heavy breathing betrayed the suffering his guardian’s cruel words caused him.

— "And we need you. You know, when our scientists created Nexus-10, they expected to endow it with only a small capacity for empathy, minimal, twenty to thirty percent of the empathy of the average person. But something went wrong, and most of the androids turned out to be non-functional, but one showed an empathy level of eighty-five percent! It was you. And I decided to keep you for myself. I raised you like the son I never had.

Tyrell changed his scathing tone to a gentle one. He approached Will, raised his hand to touch his shoulder, but he recoiled, looking at his guardian with hatred and shouted:
— "Dont touch me!"

Eldon froze. This was the first time he had encountered such a reaction from Will, but it was not in his nature to retreat. No, Eldon Tyrell never missed a beat.

He grabbed Will by the chin, forcing him to turn to him, and continued his speech:
— "Do you think you are human? No, you are just a doll, a beautiful doll for filming in advertising, to increase loyalty to the company. You are my pet! An Android with sensational empathy abilities!"

Will pushed Tyrell's hand away, rising to his feet, and walked deeper into the room.
Eldon, apparently sensing that Graham believed his words, said:
— “That’s why we sent you on a mission with this Lecter.” It’s even funny,” he chuckled. — "Android catches androids. But, of course, you won’t fly anywhere else. I'll tell Lecter myself."

— "No! Shut up!" - Will wanted to scream, but he couldn’t let his uncle feel the depth of his despair, so he just stood silently by the window, and only the tense, stone muscles of his back betrayed his pain.

A couple of minutes later, Will heard Eldon’s contented quack, the sound of retreating steps, and tiredly, doomedly closed his eyes.
Graham remembered what Tyrell had told him about his past before: supposedly he was found in the ruins of a house after a collapse, he had partially lost his memory due to injuries... Graham desperately tried to remember episodes from his childhood, life with his father. These memories were indeed fragmentary and cloudy. Will's heart sank painfully, his soul was filled with icy, deathly horror: he is not a human being...

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Hannibal was flying in his hovercar. The flight went well, the usual acid rain today was not particularly strong, and New York was already visible ahead. Switching the lever with a practiced gesture, he took another quick glance at the unoccupied chair to his right. It’s strange, before his recent trip with Will he had never even noticed the seat for the co-pilot, but today it was an eyesore, it felt unnatural, wrongly empty.

On the other hand, Hannibal was even pleased that he went on the mission alone, since hunting with an android, even such a smart one, humiliated his dignity as a professional. Lecter convinced himself that it was just that, stubbornly refusing to admit to himself that communication with Will meant more to him than it should... When company employee Tyrell told him that Graham would no longer go with him to New York , he felt something akin to relief because he had avoided the awkwardness that always arises between colleagues when they cross the line into a purely business relationship. It was all right; they really shouldn't have seen each other again. Their hunt together was wonderful, Will helped a lot, even saved him, and Hannibal was eternally grateful to him. And also admired his intelligence, gentle charm and modesty in everyday interactions, his assertiveness and toughness while working to capture fugitive andies.

Lecter couldn't help but remember their night together. It was wonderful. Despite his touching inexperience, Will turned out to be relaxed, passionate and surprisingly responsive in bed. Hannibal often recalled their sex, which happened in Ray's apartment. Every time he thought about Will’s flexible body, about his soft skin, remembered how he breathed deeply through parted lips, and dark curls scattered across the pillow, Hannibal was overcome by a hot languor.
Until he was informed that he would go after Ingrid alone, Hannibal was a little worried because he did not know how to behave with Will and what to do with his own infatuation with the android, so inappropriate and unthinkable. Illegal**. Graham was the property of one of the most powerful people on Earth, and Hannibal had no right not only to touch him, but even to think about him. Now the question has resolved itself: they will never see each other again. This should have brought relief, but for some reason it left a nagging pain in his soul. Hannibal received money from Tyrell for the liquidated androids and could already buy himself the horse he had wanted for so long, but for some reason the thought of this no longer aroused the same enthusiasm in him, just as communicating with his cat did not bring joy. Lecter was haunted by a feeling of emptiness.

Will sat in the dark and thoughtfully stroked the ruby in his new ring. At first he didn’t want to wear Eldon’s gift, or thought about wearing it only when going out, but then he realized that this thing was the only reminder of Hannibal. The color of the stone was similar to the reddish sparkles of his brown eyes. Will was overcome with deep sadness as he remembered

the smiles and kisses of the hunter; the thought that they would never see each other again pierced his heart with pain. With a sad grin Will thought it was strange - an android longs for a person. “It shouldn’t be this way. They shouldn’t have created me,” Will thought sadly at one moment, and at another he was filled with rage and the desire to fight for his freedom. But even if he could escape, how long would he live? The lifespan of androids is short, he has been living with Eldon for two years, what time was left? Two years, four?
Will overheard Eldon discussing the issue of android cell regeneration with his staff. This was critical to extending their lifespan. Tyrell hired the most talented scientists, and if he stayed here, there was a chance to live longer...

“If only I could talk to Hannibal, if only I could see him one last time!” - Will thought in despair, hitting the elegant carved table with his fist. A silver candlestick, richly inlaid with precious stones, swayed and fell from the table, but Will didn’t even notice it. His eyes looked unseeingly out the window. The drawn curtains lay nearby along with the cornice torn out with screws, but nothing was visible behind the glass except the usual gray clouds.

***

Approaching the street where, according to the information in the announcement, a charity dinner was to be held, Hannibal saw a small crowd. Turning his car around, he descended and parked around the corner. Having moved to the back seat, where the large bag lay, Lecter quickly changed his clothes. Now he was dressed not in a thick leather hunter's suit, but in a mouse-gray robe and shapeless trousers with patches. Throwing a hood over his head, he hunched his back and shuffled towards the volunteer tables. Standing at the back of the line, Hannibal began to observe. At first, he could only see the people standing nearby, who clearly looked like specialists and anomalies. They were dressed in gray and brown rags, covered with patches, similar to Lecter's current clothes, vests with many pockets, cloaks that looked like they were from someone else's shoulder. The multi-voiced crowd was talking, moving, people were constantly leaning out to see how far it was to the tables with food, discussing when it would be time for them to get lunch, scolding those who tried to push forward without waiting in line. The smell of some simple but satisfying food, such as oatmeal and vegetable soup, hung in the air. Lecter waited patiently. Beneath the rough fabric of his robe lay a deadly pistol with a fully loaded clip. Finally, the hunter moved closer to the table and was able to examine the volunteers. One was a large red-haired man with his hair tied into a bun at the back of his head, the other was a short, elderly woman.

The third volunteer was not visible because of the redhead. Hannibal craned his neck to try to see him or her, and then came across the wide blue eyes of the person standing in front of him. It was a short, plump man of indeterminate age: there were wrinkles around his eyes and nose, and the face itself was stupid, with a naive look, like a child’s. “Idiot,” Hannibal thought, and with some difficulty he suppressed the desire to take a step back.

— "Very hungry, huh?" — the idiot asked Hannibal sympathetically. - "Me too. Soon it will be our turn. The food is good here."

Lecter looked at the little man with curiosity, and he, encouraged by the fact that he was not interrupted, continued to chat:

— "I ate pasta here last time. With gravy. It was good. And you're so big, you need to eat a lot... You're sick, right? It's a pity."

Hannibal was silent, looking at the idiot in surprise.

— “I’m not sick, but my head...” the idiot tapped it expressively and immediately smiled carefreely.

— "My name is Sunny. And... you know what?" - He whispered confidentially. — "I recently found a spider! Alive!"

— "Is it true?" Lecter asked incredulously.

Any living creature was considered an incredible miracle, a real treasure. Almost the entire fauna of the Earth became extinct during the Final World War. The first to die were the birds, which simply fell from the sky like stones... Hannibal saw this when he was a child, and this terrible sight sometimes came to him in his dreams. Perhaps in the absence of birds to eat them, the insects felt more at ease, especially in abandoned buildings. Hannibal was never interested in bugs or anything like that. But the idiot was completely delighted.

— "Yes! It has eight legs, can you imagine! It carries his body on them and even crawls along the walls and ceiling!"

— "You are very lucky! Keep him safe."

— "I will! And you, take care too, eat well, you’re so big. They'll give it to us soon."

“Okay,” Hannibal chuckled. He caught himself thinking that this guy did not disgust him, he was good-natured, even sweet. Lecter always thought that idiots were repulsive and angry at everything and everyone around them...

Meanwhile, they walked further, and Hannibal saw the third volunteer, a woman with dark eyes and hair, graceful, even fragile. She had beautiful thin hands, small, pleasant, even aristocratic features. She would look great in an evening dress, long gloves and a diamond necklace or tiara, not in a volunteer's overalls***. Looking at the clear, precise movements with which the woman put food on plates and distributed food to the suffering, Hannibal understood that there could be no doubt: it was Ingrid. Without raising his head, he extended his hands for food, and having received his portion, he said in a plaintive voice:

— "Excuse me, please, I heard you are a doctor? I need help..."

Ingrid told him to wait about fifteen to twenty minutes. Hannibal obediently walked away. Looking doubtfully at the grayish porridge and thin soup in his hands, Lecter looked around and, making sure that no one could see him, hid the plates under some drawer. For the next half hour, he sat slouched and watched Ingrid as she continued to hand out food. She had a pleasant smile and a couple of kind words ready for everyone. When the line of people wishing to receive free food had dispersed, Ingrid took off her apron, squeezed some liquid soap from a bottle with a dispenser onto her hands, rubbed her palms, fingers and wrists well, rinsed with water from a bottle, then sprinkled something, apparently an antiseptic, and

headed to table with a red cross painted on it. There, a woman was already waiting for her with a burn on half her face, chest and entire arm, and a brutally beaten man, whom a friend had brought. For the first patient she lubricated the damaged areas with ointment, for the second she put a splint and ordered the assistants to bring a stretcher. They took the victim somewhere, and when Ingrid was left alone, Hannibal approached. She looked at him questioningly and openly, as if silently asking how she could help, but when she saw Lecter's gaze, the direct and firm gaze of a hunter, her face changed.

— "Ingrid," Lecter said, more affirmative than questioning.

"They know me here by a different name, but yes, it's me," the android woman answered, lowering her hands. — Shall we do a test?

— "Yes, let's get into my car.

Ingrid obediently left the table, and Hannibal grabbed her by the elbow and led her to the punishment.

They sat down inside, Hannibal attached a disk to Ingrid's forehead and directed a beam into her pupil. Everything was ready. Ingrid obediently answered all the questions, the reactions were correct, but, as Hannibal expected, they appeared a little later than people's ones. There was one last question left when Ingrid asked tiredly:

—"Maybe we can stop? You knew who I was from the very beginning..."

- "Yes, I knew."

Hannibal narrowed his eyes with interest. Looked into Ingrid's eyes:

— "I'm wondering why you work in this fund? Why waste your time on idiots and anomalies? With your appearance you could be on television or... well, live in luxury."

But Ingrid just shook her head:

- "I do not need it."

- "Why did you run away? Why did you come here?"

"We just wanted to live freely. Ida - to perform on stage, Gina - to live without sexual slavery, Ray - from exhausting work in the mine. He dreamed of living with Gina, being a family, not sharing her with anyone. Well, I always wanted to help people. For example, today. You saw that woman with burns, right? I gave her the ointment that I brought from the colonies; there is no such thing here. Without it the woman would have suffered terribly."

Hannibal fell silent. There was really no point in asking questions. Suddenly he thought about what Will would say, how he would react to Ingrid. After all, she was not the slightest threat to people. For some reason, Lecrer thought: Will would say that people needed her alive, that the world became a better place with her. Hannibal disconnected the disk from the android's forehead, folded the device and sat for a while, stroking the skin of the suitcase with his

hands. He thought about this situation, Ingrid sat silently next to him, awaiting her fate. And Hannibal made a decision.

Chapter 8

Will looked at the vintage desk calendar on the natural wood stand again and again. It was the day of the charity dinner, the day Hannibal was supposed to eliminate the last android. After that, he will receive the rest of the fee, fly to the Tannhäuser Gate, where he will start a new life, and Graham will continue to live in this hated room filled with expensive trinkets. And Will would be nothing more than a toy... With Hannibal, he felt alive, felt like a man. But he will never see Hannibal again.

The minutes passed, and with each one hope disappeared. When the clock struck three, the start time for the volunteers, Will felt overcome by such mortal melancholy, such unbearable pain that he stood up, grabbed a scalpel for sharpening pencils from the table and went to Tyrell. He decided that he would put a knife to his throat and demand Eldon to let him go, otherwise he would kill himself. And it would be better than rotting in a damned golden cage under the tutelage of a monster who pretended to be his uncle.

***

The hovercar's silver fender gleamed, reflecting the advertising lights.

“Emigrate or degrade,” they said, their sickly-sweet voices, perfect faces and white-toothed smiles accompanied Lecter most of the way.

Hannibal thoughtfully pulled the lever, turning towards the house. He thought about Ingrid, her smart, understanding eyes and skillful hands, giving people food and relieving them of suffering. About her incredibly kind and brave heart. About how she took risks, stealing medicine from a hospital in the colony and escaping. And for what? To help specials, anomals, the wretched, the crooked, the ugly — those who here on Earth are not even considered to be people... Will would definitely have saved her life, and Hannibal decided to do the same. It was a kind of gift from him to Graham. They may not see each other again, but Will must definitely learn about it from Eldon. Maybe he will smile... At the thought of this, Hannibal’s heart ached. He wanted to grab a weapon and destroy the walls of Tyrell's company building, burst inside and go to Will, killing everyone in his path. And he would do it ruthlessly, but he understood that one person has no chance against a huge corporation. Hannibal convinced himself that he would be able to forget the beautiful android at the Tannhäuser Gate, that another, new life awaited him, and everything that happened to them on Earth would remain only a sweet dream. Lecter had enough money that he had been saving for many years and the fee for the already killed andies, and he had to disappear as quickly as possible, because he let Ingrid leave.

Hannibal parked at his apartment and went inside. There he took a bag, put the most necessary things there, took money from the hiding place, and from a small closet — a cat carrier and placed the pet inside. The cat meowed, dissatisfied with the lack of his usual affection, and suddenly hissed, looking somewhere behind his owner. Lecter turned around and instinctively grabbed his weapon when he saw a figure in a dark cloak with a large hood

at the door. Having noticed, however, the familiar dark curls, carved lips and stubborn chin, he rushed to the newcomer:

— "Will! Why are you here"...

Will silently took off his hood and looked from under his brows into Hannibal's eyes with a long and intent gaze. He was so gloomy and quiet that Lecter stopped mid-sentence. He busily took off Graham's coat and led him into his tiny kitchen, where he poured him a glass of water and began to make coffee.

— "Will, what happened?"

He continued to remain silent. He did not sit down on the chair offered by the owner and did not touch the water. Hannibal peered into Graham's face. It seemed that everything about him was as usual, but at the same time it was not like that: naivety and purity disappeared from his eyes, some strange, never-before-seen fire was now shining in them.

— "Will?" — Hannibal repeated his question, beginning to worry seriously.

“I...” — Will swallowed as if his throat was dry. — "I killed Tyrell."

— "What? But how? Why?"

— “I’ll tell you everything, just give me a minute.”

Will sank heavily into a chair and dropped his head into his hands. It was as if all his strength had suddenly gone out of him and for some time he just sat there, hiding his face. Hannibal allowed him to recover, turning to the stove to take the coffee off the heat, let it rest, and bring it back to a boil.

Questions and guesses crowded in Hannibal's head. Will, charming Will, sweet and innocent hothouse flower. What made him take up arms against his guardian? Did he forbid them to see each other? Or maybe he harassed Will himself? At this thought, Hannibal ground his teeth so hard that Will raised his head in search of the source of the strange sound.

— “Did... did he harass you?” — Hannibal tried to sound quiet, but his voice trembled.

— " What? God, no, I’m something else for him. I’m his toy,” Will smiled bitterly.

He accepted the cup of coffee from Lecter's hands and continued:

— “For him, I’m like a rare figurine, or an elegant porcelain cup.” Part of the collection. Like my electric owl."

— “I thought it was real.”

— "Me too... But it was a lie. Everything was a lie!"

— "But you..."

— "I am an android, Hannibal. Not a human. He only recently told me."

Will's eyes were filled with despair and pain, but Hannibal looked at him calmly. Not seeing the expected reaction, Will frowned, quickly scanning Lecter's face.

— "Did you know?"

Hannibal nodded:

— "Eldon told me the first time we met."

Will bit his lip and after a moment's pause continued:

“I realized that I can’t do it anymore. That it is better to die than to continue to live in slavery to Tyrell. After everything that happened... I went to him, I wanted to kill myself. Or force Eldon to let me go. But he started saying nasty things about you, about us, and I... I don’t know what came over me, but I hit him in the neck with a scalpel. He immediately fell down, there was a lot of blood... I locked him there, in his office, and released the secretary. They won't miss him until tomorrow morning. Well, then I decided to come here. Do you despise me?" — Will asked barely audibly, bowing his head in shame.

— "Not at all."

— "Is it true? Well, it doesn't matter now. I came to say goodbye. Now that you've eliminated the last andy, you'll leave and..."

— "I didn’t kill Ingrid.”

Will looked up at him, his beautiful eyes were wider than usual, filled with sorrow and surprise. He was so fragile at that moment, so vulnerable, but at the same time Will didn't have that passive humility of other androids, he fought for his freedom. Truly unique. Hannibal felt something turn inside him. He swallowed and began to talk:

— "I let her go. She doesn't harm anyone. On the contrary, it helps people. Feeds them, treats them. This is the first time I've seen this. Thought about you. You wouldn't liquidate her".

Will was silent, looking a little incredulous, but a tiny spark of hope lit up in the depths of his eyes, and Hannibal wanted to grab him in his arms and kiss him until dawn.

— “I thought you despised androids,” Graham said.

— "I used to before I met you, then Ingrid and... You know, some androids are better than people."

— “That’s right,” Will chuckled.

Having noticed that Graham had perked up a little, Hannibal asked him:

— "Where are you going now? Do you have a plan?"

Will just shook his head, his face becoming confused.

— "Then come with me. I have one apartment no one knows about. Drink your coffee, we need to get out of here as quickly as possible. I'm sure they're already looking for you."

Will nodded and began to drink intently. Hannibal turned away, raising the corner of his lips in a restrained smile. The coffee was not of the best quality; Graham was probably used to drink something much more worthy, but from the grateful glances he cast at Hannibal, everything was clear without words.

Will put the empty cup in the sink, but Hannibal immediately pulled it out and took it with his in one hand, picking up his bags with the other. Will put his cloak back on and they went out. Lecter threw away the cups at one of the trash containers outside his house. The search that will certainly take place soon should not reveal out that Hannibal was not alone.

Half an hour later they landed in a suburb teeming with specials.

— “It’s better to get lost in the crowd,” Hannibal said with a sly smile.

He began to pull things out of the car, and then a meow was heard.

Will noticed the carrier:

— "Oh, do you have a cat? From Sydney?"

— "No, he's real."

— "God, this is... I've never seen a live cat!"

Wil looked into the narrow holes of the carrier, trying to see Lecter's pet, and getting under his feet.

— "He's gray, right? Can I pet him later?"

— "Of course it is possible. Let's just get to the apartment."

The men went up to the apartment. It was a small room, equipped with everything necessary. Lecter set the bags down and, seeing Will's impatience, opened the door of the carrier. Looking around and sniffing, the cat carefully stepped outside and stared at Graham.

— "Let him smell your hand. Stretch your palm up,” Hannibal advised.

Will did so, crouching down to be closer to Lecter's pet, and watched in delight as the animal brought its little pink nose closer to his fingers.

— "Why is he sniffing me?"

— "He gets to know you like that, remembers your smell."

— "He has such a big mustache! And eyes! Yellow, such a vivid color. A very beautiful cat. What's his name?"

— "Louis, in honor of King Louis XIV of France."*

— "The Sun King?" — Will smiled and looked up at Lecter.

He nodded, smiling contentedly. Few people were interested in history and the great people of the pre-war period, and yet it stored a huge amount of interesting information about great battles, achievements and incredible destinies.

— “You can pet him,” Hannibal suggested. — "From head to back, strictly along the coat."

Will gently stroked Louis.

— "His fur is very pleasant to the touch."

The cat purred contentedly, stretching his neck, exposing his head to the caress.

— “He obviously liked you,”— Hannibal remarked.

— "Yes? Why?"

— "Animals feel when someone is kind to them."

— "Yes, probably... Just like people."

Hannibal began to unpack his bags, thinking that Eldon, with his huge fortune, could buy an entire zoo, and he only had one electric owl. He wanted to voice this thought out loud, but he remembered that Will had talked about their relationship with Tyrell and only clenched his teeth tighter. Before Lecter had believed that having an android assistant was not only perfectly acceptable, but also very convenient, now he supposed that having a thinking creature as a pet was completely immoral.

Will looked at Hannibal carefully and asked:

— “I still don’t understand, Hannibal.” You spent twelve years killing androids and suddenly you let Ingrid go. Did one meeting really change you so much?"

— “It was you who changed me,” Hannibal said softly, walked up to Graham and stroked his cheek. Will looked at him with all his eyes, not believing that Lecter learned the whole truth about him and did not push him away. Hannibal touched his lips with his thumb and kissed him slowly, tenderly.

— "If you have nowhere to go... if you want, fly to Tannhäuser with me. I have enough money,”— he whispered and looked into Will’s eyes, waiting for an answer.

Graham's gaze darted across both Hannibal’s eyes, he swallowed convulsively:

— “I would love to, but I... I don’t know exactly how many years of my work have left, maybe only a couple...”

His voice dropped to almost a silent whisper, he was simply killed, and at the same time happy because of Lecter's offer, and these feelings tore at his soul.

— "It's OK. I would prefer two years with you than a whole life without you, Will!"

Graham inhaled loudly, impulsively hugged Hannibal, pressing his whole body against him and whispered:

— "Let's do it. Let's run away together!"

Hannibal stroked his hair and kissed the top of his head.

— "Then we’ll stay here today. The spaceship to the Tannhäuser Gate leaves tomorrow morning. We have a meeting in an hour. We need to get prepared."

***

Will was sitting on a chair, his shoulders covered with a white towel. Hannibal stood behind him, carefully running his fingers through Will's curls. Sighing heavily, Lecter took the scissors.

— “As much as I regret depriving you of your beautiful curls, it is absolutely necessary” — Lecter said.

— "I don't regret at all! Start, please!" - Graham ordered.

Hannibal cut off the first strand and, unable to resist, kissed the exposed skin of Will's neck. Having trimmed the back, he moved to the side and, exposing the place behind Will's ear, kissed there too.

— “Hannibal, this way the haircut will take a lot longer,” Graham noted with feigned dissatisfaction, but Hannibal felt that he was smiling and kissed his temple.

Soon it was done. Will now had a short haircut, which made him look stricter and more masculine and emphasized the sharp features of his face, and also revealed his slightly protruding ears. Hannibal immediately declared that they were adorable.

Hannibal quickly shaved his head and took a false beard out of his suitcase. After fiddling with it for about fifteen minutes, he became completely unrecognizable. The men also chose clothes that differed from their usual outfits: instead of a dark leather suit, Hannibal wore a baggy T-shirt, a sweatshirt and sweatpants. Will put on a plaid shirt, sand-colored trousers, and a khaki jacket with many pockets. Hannibal gave him glasses with black frames, the lenses were without diopters.

— “Please put them on, they will hide your incredible eyes a little,” — he said, holding out the glasses, and Will have him a shy but pleased smile.

It was time to go to the meeting Hannibal spoke about. After flying several blocks, they found themselves in a noisy neighborhood. There were signs everywhere, people were scurrying about, and trade was brisk. Will barely had time to dodge between passers-by. Noticing that Graham, unaccustomed to the city crowd, was uncomfortable here, Hannibal firmly took his hand, and they continued on their way. Soon Hannibal turned into a narrow, dirty alley. Carefully stepping over piles of garbage and streams of suspicious liquid, they reached a small door. Hannibal knocked several times with a conventional knock. The door opened and a man of unknown age appeared, black dreadlocks on his head were tied with a red bandana, and there was a scar on his cheek. He was dressed in something leopard-print, either a robe or a cape. This man greeted Hannibal as an old friend, and Will was surprised that reserved and strict Lecter could have such an acquaintance. The men entered a dark, cramped room, lined with tables with computers, printers and other equipment. On one of the walls a large sheet of white paper hung. The owner of the room introduced himself as Gary and ordered Will to stand by the sheet, while he himself took the camera. Graham looked questioningly at Hannibal, who nodded calmly and explained:

— "Gary will make us new documents. For now, think about what name you would like to take for yourself."

— "What name will you have?" Will asked as Gary took a photo of him and got to work on the computer.

— "Marcus Gustafson."

- "Unusual. And I'd prefer something less Scandinavian, like Adam," Will said thoughtfully. He glanced at the distant towers of the city center sen through the small dirty window and added: "Adam Towers."

— "The name of the first person on Earth. Great," Hannibal smiled.

— "Do you already have documents for your new name?" - Graham asked.

Hannibal nodded.

— "This handsome started to visit me several months ago," Gary grinned.

Will raised an eyebrow and Hannibal explained:

— "I was here for the first time two months ago." I decided to start a new life on Tannhäuser. Leave the hunter's biography in the past.

— "Oh, I understand."

Half an hour later everything was ready. Gary gave the men two plastic cards with photos and new information. As he saw them off, he winked playfully:

— "And you guys look great together."

Will looked at him, at Lecter, and smiled shyly, and Lecter calmly and confidently replied:

— "Agree. And you, Gary, don't be jealous."

— "Why should I be jealous? I have my Giselle," Gary said, throwing up his hands.

"She is a wonderful woman," Hannibal said peacefully. — Well, goodbye, thanks for your help.

"Goodbye," they muttered after him, and they left.

On the street Will asked:

— "Is Gary a special?"

Hannibal nodded.

— "Is Giselle his wife?"

— "No. They just live together."

— "But specials are forbidden to have families, aren't they?"

Hannibal was silent for a moment, then looked deeply into Will's eyes and replied:

— "You know, I didn't understand it before, but now I think there are no barriers to real feelings."

***

They returned to Hannibal's car. Lecter started the engine when Will suddenly asked:

— "Are we coming to your place now?"

— "Yes, or are there any options?"

— " I need... Can we get to one place, very quickly?" — asked Will.

Hannibal saw the pleading in his wide eyes, realized that this was something important, otherwise Graham would not have remembered it, and nodded in agreement. They took off, and Will began to show the direction. Ten minutes into the flight, Graham saw a familiar small building and ordered Lecter to land near it. Hannibal did so, reading the sign with surprise: "Tyrell Film Studios." Will came out, threw on his hood, and, bowing his head low, ducked through the door. Hannibal followed him.

Graham walked along the corridor without looking around, his whole appearance told about confident and gloomy determination. Having reached a door marked "Chief Director, Mr. Jerry Knox," he took something small and silver from his pocket, fiddled with the lock for a couple of seconds, and opened the door. Lecter followed him in, quickly closing the door behind him. Inside, he saw a large office, the walls of which were decorated with posters,

awards, photographs of some man in tasteless bright shirts hugging or just next to smartly dressed people, apparently celebrities. In one of the photos, Hannibal recognized TV presenter Buster Friendly. In the middle of the office there was a table on which there were two monitors, and below there was a large system unit. Will sat down at the table, turning on the computer. Hannibal walked up to him, looking back at the door. The situation was not good, what if the owner of the office came in here? Lecter had to kill androids more than once, but not people...

Meanwhile, Will was banging on the keys, trying to crack the password. He cursed because he couldn't do it, rubbed his forehead, and tried again. Hannibal cocked the gun just in case, and then they heard a knock on the door. Will froze, but immediately sighed with obvious relief when he heard a woman's voice:

— "Jerry, it's me, Robin. Can I come in?"

Will ran to the door, quickly opened it and pulled the girl in, who only managed to open her mouth in amazement, and again securely locked the lock.

— "Will? What are you...?"

— "Shh! Quiet, please," — Will held Robin by the shoulder, putting a finger to her lips. Lecter tensed when he saw this, and the hunter's soul was pricked with jealousy.

— "Listen, Robin, I'm leaving. I ran away from my uncle and will never appear here again. I want to erase all videos with my participation. I need your help."
Robin shrugged, dumbfounded, and looked at Lecter and his weapon. Hannibal calmly looked back into her eyes and lowered his gun.

— "This is my friend, we will not harm you, we only need the password. I just want to finally be free from all this, you know? Maybe you know his password? — Graham said, smiling kindly and sweetly, and let go of her hand.

— "Yes, I understand. I've always seen that this bothers you," Robin replied, nodding and heading towards her boss's computer.

— "Password "jerrynoxthebest". Folder "Ready videos" on drive C."

— "So simple?" — Will laughed.

- Yes. The files are named by date.

Will found the folder and began deleting files taken on the dates he was here. Robin stood nearby and prompted.

— "Thank you, Robin! You have no idea how much this means to me."

— "I think I can imagine. You always looked so unhappy here and with Tyrell. I'm glad you found a friend."

She smiled sincerely at Hannibal, and he could not help but respond, feeling sincere sympathy for Robin.

“Remove it from the basket too,” the girl advised. “And then I’ll bring and install something so that they can’t be restored.I have a friend who is a real nerd and can do it. By the way, what are you planning to do next?"

Robin looked at Will questioningly.

— “We’ll fly away from here,” he answered and looked at Hannibal with a smile. He nodded, squinting slightly, and happiness shone in the wrinkles around his eyes.

Robin noticed the way they were looking at each other and touched Graham's arm.

— "This is wonderful! I'm very happy for you, Will."

She smiled sadly. Will turned to the girl, feeling her sadness.

— “Is everything ok?”

— “It’s okay, I really think you’re both very lucky.”

— "Well, what about you? You work here to also save up for emigration, right? Will it happen soon?"

Robin shook her head slowly.

— "No. I mean, yes, but I’m not saving for myself. I have a mother, she was injured during the Final General and cannot work, and I also have a younger brother. He is weak and often gets sick. First of all, I want to send them to the Tannhäuser Gate..."

Graham said quietly:

— "I did not know..."

Will imagined a thin, pale child, Robin's brother, as kind as she herself, and was horrified. The poor boy is growing up among radiation dust... Not knowing what to say, he lowered his eyes to his hands and glanced at the ring. The scarlet ruby sparkled as if it was telling him exactly what he, Will, should do with it. Graham looked briefly at Hannibal, took the jewelry off his finger and handed it to the girl:

— " Take it as a gift for your help."

— “God, Will, no, I can’t...” Robin protested, but Will himself took her palm, put a ring on it and bent the girl’s fingers so that they clasped the gift.

— "Take it. That's what I decided. This is enough to save you all. Maybe we'll see you again on Tannhäuser."

Will's voice was quiet but firm. Robin looked at his face and saw that Will had changed a lot. He was no longer thesad and restraint young man she was used to seeing him before. He was a confident, decisive man. Robin thanked him profusely, clutching the ring to her chest. Will nodded at her, caught Hannibal's gaze, who was looking at him with admiration, and stood up.

— "Well, that's it now. It's time for us to go. Be happy, Robin!"

Graham kissed the girl on the top of her blonde head and went towards the exit. At the door, he felt Hannibal place his hand on his back, and the touch sent warmth through his body.

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The gray color of the sky became thicker and darker, signaling the onset of night. Hannibal checked the things, documents and weapons once again. Hannibal left his service pistol in his previous apartment, taking with him only a couple of small guns that he obtained illegally and which were not registered with him.

Everything was ready for the escape; all that remained was to wait for the spacecraft to depart.

The men dined, tasting the food Hannibal had prepared. It was a cozy, almost family dinner, and Lecter found himself thinking that he would be glad if such meals became a habit. He voiced the thought and Will responded with a warm smile. Then Graham began to play with Louis, he sat him on his lap, stroked him, sliding his fingers through his soft plush fur. The cat closed his eyes contentedly and purred.

Hannibal looked at them with affection as he washed the dishes. Then he came and sat at Will's feet, as if he wanted him to pet him the same way he petted the animal.

Graham looked at him, saw the hunger in his eyes and froze for a second. Is that really true? Is he really free and is next to his loved one, and they have a life together ahead of them?

Lecter looked at him silently, as if he was expecting something. He took off his false beard and now, without the usual bangs, his face was open, naked. Will had no trouble reading his mood: his devotion, his passion. He carefully put the cat aside. The pet immediately stood up on his paws, jumped off and trotted towards the kitchen and his bowls.

Will stood up, and so did Hannibal. They didn't know what to say and looked into each other's eyes in silence for a while. Hannibal touched Will's hand with his fingertips. From this touch, both of them felt like they were receiving an electric shock. Will grabbed Hannibal's shoulders and pressed a kiss to his lips. Hannibal immediately hugged him, eagerly returning the kiss, then turned, taking Will along with him. Without looking, he sat down, pulled Graham towards him, so that Will straddled him. Hannibal looked up to Will with endless adoration. He wrapped his arm around Graham's waist, reached under his shirt, gently ran his palm up from his lower back to his shoulder blades, enjoying the silk smoothness of the skin, and nuzzled his collarbone.

— "Did you miss me?" Will asked, running his hand over the unusually short stubble on Lecter’s head and tilting his head back.

— "Madly! — Hannibal breathed, leaving a chain of hot kisses on Will's neck, and it was the absolute truth. No matter how hard Hannibal tried to convince himself that his infatuation to Will was a fleeting and unimportant whim, deep down he always knew that it was not so. And finally Will was free, and Will came to him. A wave of delight and tenderness flooded Hannibal, and he reverently kissed Graham's chest and pressed his cheek to it. He could hear Will's heart beating.

"Just like the real one...” — Lecter thought absentmindedly. — “Well, screw this! Android or not, I love him.”

He looked up at Will's face, and Will, as if sensing that he was thinking about something important but not speaking, touched his lips with his fingertips, allowed Hannibal to kiss them and gently take them into his mouth.

— “Please take off your clothes, I want to see you completely,” Hannibal whispered a little bit later.

Will obediently began to get rid of his clothes, and Hannibal helped, stroking and kissing the exposed parts of the body, with an expression of absolute delight on his face. Every now and then he raised his head to look at Will's face, and he answered him with a gentle and slightly embarrassed smile.

When Graham was completely naked, Hannibal stood up and hugged him tightly. With words expressing admiration for the young man's beauty, he held him close, running his hand along Will's smooth, flexible back, now caressing his neck and shoulders, now returning down to stroke and squeeze the firm roundness of his buttocks.

Will was silent and breathing heavily, also exploring Hannibal's body with his hands. After a couple of minutes of affectionate hugging, he gently pushed Lecter towards the bed.

— "Do you want it like that time?" — Hannibal asked, looking up from Will's chest, which he was covering with kisses.

— “No, I want to try something new,” Graham replied, his eyes darkening. Today he was different, but he still retained his old shyness, and Lecter decided to give him the opportunity to open up.

Hannibal returned to his lover's body to tease his nipples with his lips and tongue, moved lower to his stomach and thighs, then grabbed Will's rock-hard penis, kissed the head and licked a drop of moisture. Hearing his partner's surprised gasp, Hannibal grinned and wrapped his lips around his penis, gently slid down to the very base, caressing it from the inside with his tongue, returned up and repeated. The answer to his efforts was Will's beautiful moans.

“So sensitive!” thought Hannibal. "I wonder if he has..." Lightly pressing Graham's thighs, he spread them apart. Having generously moistened his finger with his own saliva, Hannibal gently slid between the buttocks, stroked and rubbed the tight ring of muscles. Without

ceasing to diligently caress Will's penis with his mouth, he carefully penetrated inside. It was necessary to find that very place. Hannibal twirled his finger inside, bent it slightly, and heard:

— "Oh, God!"

Will arched and covered Hannibal's head with his palm, instinctively pressing down, forcing him to take him deeper. Lecter smiled approvingly, without letting go of Will's penis from his mouth, he worked with his mouth faster, squeezing his lips tighter and caressing Will's body from the inside. Will squirmed and almost screamed in his arms, and Lecter truly enjoyed it.

— "Hannibal, I'm about to..." — he whispered, and Lecter immediately pulled away and sat up on the bed, looking contentedly at the disheveled, gasping Will, who looked as if his oxygen had been taken away.

— "Do you want to cum in my mouth?" — asked Hannibal with the air of a tempting serpent.

“Yes,” — Will breathed loudly and reached out to Hannibal, but he had his own plans.

— “Sit on top,” — Hannibal allowed, laying down on his back next to Will. — "The main thing is don’t be shy, let yourself go."

— “But...” — Will hesitated. – "You might feel uncomfortable."

— "Don't think about me. I want to see you take what you want!"

Will rose up on his elbows and, thinking, began to look at Hannibal. Lecter smiled wickedly, waiting. Will looked into his eyes, sparkling with seduction, caught his gaze on the inviting curve of his large, sharply defined lips and in one motion straddled Lecter's chest. He willingly grabbed his hips, opening his mouth slightly, and Will pushed inside. The familiar wet warmth of the lips and the soft elasticity of the tongue embraced his dick, but from above it felt completely different. Now Will had control, and it turned him on even more. He began to move carefully, and when he saw that Hannibal was not showing any signs of discomfort, he began to gradually increase his pace. Owning another person, especially such a strong and dangerous man, was intoxicatingly beautiful. Hannibal tried to relax his throat as much as possible, allowing Will to penetrate as deeply as possible, squeezing his buttocks and caressing him with his fingers from the inside. When Will poured himself inside his mouth with a long groan, Hannibal swallowed everything, and after licking Will’s penis, he turned him over, softened and pliable, onto his back, and hung on top:

— "Now it's my turn!"

Lecter quickly and hungrily kissed Will's lips, grabbed his legs under the knees and lifted them up. The next moment, Hannibal’s tongue, hot, nimble, greedy, walked along the cleft between Will’s buttocks, circled the sphincter, opening up new facets of sensations for him again. Then Lecter unzipped his pants, took out his penis, placed the head at the entrance and looked questioningly at Will. Will nodded his head affirmatively, and Hannibal carefully pushed inside.

From the inevitable sharp pain, Graham threw his head back, and Hannibal leaned down to touch his cheek with his palm, stroke him, kiss his inviting soft lips, to whisper tender words. All this had an effect, Will relaxed, and Hannibal, who had been holding back his desire for a very long time, finally began to move. Changing the angle slightly, he carefully pushed again and was pleased to see Will shudder violently, and a loud moan of pleasure escaped his lips. Lecter's dick brushed over the same spot a second time, and Will arched, pressing his heels into the bed. Hannibal slowed down the pace, literally tormenting Will with sharp, long, almost painful pleasure, eagerly peering into Graham's face, catching the slightest shades of his emotions, sighs and moans. It was great. Hannibal had never had such passionate sex, such a reverent and responsive lover. Yes, he was breaking the law by making love to an android, but Hannibal didn't care.

Feeling that he was close to release, Hannibal took pity on Will and wrapped his hand around his penis. Having made several strong frictions, he moved his palm at the same pace until he heard a long groan from Will, who was gasping for air, and felt how his penis twitched, erupting, how his ass contracted from the inside, literally milking Hannibal, turning his whole soul inside out in violent and long orgasm.

After catching his breath a little, Hannibal carefully walked out and, kissing Will's forehead, asked if everything was okay. Seeing how he nodded his head affirmatively and smiled weakly, tiredly and happily, he stroked his leg and went to the shower. Will followed him. All wet, he was so charming and touching that Hannibal reached out to hug him again, but Will laughed and gently pushed him away.

The morning came, as gray and rainy as always on Earth after the Final General. In books, Hannibal read a lot about beautiful pink sunrises, about the bright and warm sun that illuminates everything and gives life, about the moon that hangs like a translucent slice in the blue sky on a summer evening, about the stars that twinkle in the blue of a fragrant August night. He dreamed of seeing all this in reality, and hoped that at the Tannhäuser Gate there would be at least something similar. This hope had warmed him for years, and now it was closer than ever. Hannibal took a deep breath, full of joyful anticipation. He got up earlier while Will was sleeping. He lay spread out on the bed, his face serene and bright, like an angel's one. After admiring him a little, Lecter began preparing a quick breakfast. Thoughts of Tannhäuser lifted his spirits and he turned to Will, smiling. However, his smile immediately changed into a worried expression, because Graham was lying on the bed in the fetal position and his eyes were sad.

— "What's happened? Are you hurt?"

He shook his head and after a short pause answered:

— "Hannibal, I want you to think again about whether you should take me with you. If you go alone, they will give you a new android, and... what will happen to me in a couple of years?"

— "Listen, Will," Hannibal came and sat down in front of the bed. — "One of the ancient men said: It is better to love and lose than not to love at all. I agree to that."

"You're amazing," — Will whispered, stroking Hannibal's forearm.

— "I? You are the one who is unique."

— "Yeah. The development of a brilliant scientist...” Will became sad.

— "Sorry, that's not what I meant."

— "Nothing. Since you accept me like this, I don’t need anything else,” Will answered and thought. Something was swirling at the edge of his consciousness, some kind of memory, but he couldn't figure out what it was.

Hannibal hugged him and Will leaned his head against his shoulder in gratitude.

Satisfied that Will's mood had returned to normal, Hannibal returned to the table to cut bread and cheese. Graham went to the bathroom. They quickly had breakfast and twenty minutes later they were already on their way to the cosmodrome.

Chapter 9

Hannibal pushed the doctor aside and almost ran to Will's room. He was lying on the bed, still weak and pale, but his eyes were open. Joy lit up in them when he saw Lecter:

— "Hannibal, it's you..."
— "It's me, Will. How are you?"

Hannibal sat down next to Graham, clasped his hand in his palms, greedily peering into his beloved's face.

— "I don't know, some kind of weakness in my whole body, I can't lift my hand, but otherwise it seems fine," — Will answered and immediately hurried to say: "Listen, I remembered something very important!"

And Will told him about how Eldon, apparently unintentionally, mentioned the name of the scientist who created Will.

— "We need to find him to find out what is your life cycle and how to extend it," — Hannibal concluded.

Will just blinked silently, looking at him, then asked:

— "And Louis? What will happen to him? He was left at the airport..."

— "Unfortunately, he was. I can't bring him back, it's too dangerous."

Hannibal smiled sadly, touched by Will's grief. He also regretted the loss of his pet, but now he had someone who needed his care even more.

— "Don't worry about him, a living cat won't be left without a bed and food. He's probably already with new loving owners."

***

Will spent a week in the hospital. The bionic tissues healed quickly, obviously programmed for rapid regeneration. All this time, Hannibal was with him. Every evening he came after quiet time to check on his beloved and tell him about how another day at headquarters went. Hannibal could not sit idle, and when Ingrid offered him to help them, unexpectedly for himself, he agreed. Lecter worked in the kitchen, preparing simple and hearty meals for the hospital patients, and this brought him pleasure. He liked to be useful and, for once, to create, and not destroy. Will was delighted with this occupation of Lecter, he said that he had long felt that in Hannibal there was not only darkness, but also light. Hannibal modestly kept silent, but in his soul he was also glad to do something good. It seemed right, since he could not help Will.

When Will's seven days in the hospital were up, McNamara called Hannibal into his office and explained that he had done all he could with Will's bionic body part. The rest was beyond his power.

And then there are those who need hospitalization. People.

Hannibal nodded understandingly, stood up, and shook the good-natured, big doctor's hand firmly. He knew who would help his Will.

Vogel.
But he still had to be found.

Will was discharged, and as Hannibal prepared to leave the city, he stopped by Ingrid's. He gave her a plain white envelope containing money for the fund. It was a joint decision between him and Will. Ingrid accepted the help calmly, without fawning or pouring out streams of gratitude, and Hannibal liked that. As he left, he looked back and caught himself thinking that he would forever remember this small, fragile woman with a regal gestures. The android woman he saved and who made him discover his desire to help people.

The fugitives visited Gary again and got new passports. Hannibal parted with his bangs, opting for a classic haircut and thin-framed glasses. Will had his hair cut short in the hospital, and he decided to keep it, plus he grew a small, neat beard that suited him incredibly. Hannibal got him a spacious dark cape, which he carefully wrapped Will in, hiding the exposed nitinol parts of his body.

They learned that the next spaceship to the Tannhäuser Gate was leaving in a week, and decided to devote these seven days to finding Vogel. With Gary's help they found a hacker who had hacked the computer of the Tyrell Corporation HR department. It turned out that Vogel had been fired almost two years ago. Moreover, it turned out that a man named Robert Graham had never worked there.

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